

BRITAIN'S HIGHEST PAID MAN

The City asks: 'Is this ex-tennis pro worth £66m a year?'

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STARTS TODAY: SEX AT WORK

Judi James asks should you or shouldn't you?

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BILL GATES SIGNS UP BARNEY

Why a dinosaur is set to conquer the world

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OUR MAN ON EVEREST

Stephen Goodwin begins the long trek to base camp

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THE INDEPENDENT

Monday 30 March 1998 45p (IR 50p) No 3,571

Blair to hire 20,000 for millennium bug army

Exclusive

By Anthony Bevis
Political Editor

A 20,000-STRONG army of "Bug Busters" is to be trained to tackle the threat posed by the millennium computer "date-change" crisis, Tony Blair will announce today.

In an article for the *Independent*, he says the "technical timebomb" poses a "serious threat to our economic performance" and the possibility of "major disruption to essential services such as benefit payments or even emergency services such as hospitals, the fire service and the police".

The Government will offer grants to train young people, the older unemployed or retired people to help companies deal with the bug. Mr Blair says it will help them launch careers in information technology.

The Prime Minister, who has tabled the millennium bug as an item for discussion by the coming meeting of the G8 countries in Birmingham, is to attend a conference on the problem in London this morning. Com-

puters are threatened by the bug because millions of programs have been created on the basis of a two-digit year, like 98. When they turn to zero, zero at the end of next year, many will be unable to distinguish between the year 2000 and 1990. The full consequences of that confusion, and the chain-link reaction of computer crashes cannot be known until the millennium itself.

Mr Blair says in today's *Independent* that although the Government is leading the way in raising awareness, only 37 out of 128 countries borrowing from the World Bank said they were aware of the problem and only six had set up awareness-raising campaign organisations like Britain's Action 2000.

But, while awareness of the problem was complete in the UK, a quarter of companies had not started taking action.

"So there has been progress, but not enough," Mr Blair says. £70m set aside in this month's budget will be used to help small and medium companies to develop information-technology skills to assess and fix systems which would be hit by the millennium bug.

"We will offer a £1,300 time-limited grant for people to train in how to look for and solve the year 2000 problem," he says.

"If we get the response from business we are looking for, there will be an army of 20,000 'bug busters' fully trained between now and next April."

Mr Blair, who estimates the cost of dealing with the problem across the public sector stands at £3bn, also announces that he is increasing the budget for Action 2000 from £1m to £17m and putting £10m into a new World Bank Trust Fund to provide experts on training to developing countries in the hope that other European and developed countries will follow the lead.

Mr Blair says in today's *Independent* that John Prescott, deputy Prime Minister, and Sir Jeremy Betcham, chairman of the Local Government Association, are writing to every local authority leader and chief executive "asking them to set up their own task forces to raise awareness in their local areas and to co-ordinate action between the private and public sector locally".

Tony Blair writes, page 17



Paul Weller and the singers the Medieval Babs walk in London to mark the 30th anniversary of the homeless charity Crisis Photograph: Kalpesh Lathiga

Police probe Hall's £200m deal

Exclusive

By Ian Baird
and Tim Larkin

A PROPOSED £200m property development involving a company controlled by Douglas Hall, the former Newcastle United vice-chairman, is being probed by police involved in one of the largest ever investigations into alleged local government corruption.

Fraud Squad detectives have spoken to former and serving councillors in Doncaster in connection with an ambitious plan to build a championship golf course, leisure, hotel and busi-

ness complex and 1,100 homes on prime agricultural and green belt land.

The *Independent* has learned that the Rossington Hall project is one of at least six developments being examined by detectives investigating the so-called Donnygate scandal, which has led to the suspension of the district Labour party.

An 18-strong police team expect to spend two years on their inquiry - Operation Danum - the Roman name for Doncaster.

The Rossington Hall development stemmed from Newcastle tycoon Sir John Hall's dream of turning a part of the Yorkshire countryside into a

version of Wynyard Hall - his family's estate in Cleveland. His son Douglas is chairman of Rossington Hall Investments, the company behind the project.

Douglas Hall last week resigned as vice-chairman of Newcastle United football club after mocking the club's supporters and the women of Newcastle in comments made to an undercover newspaper reporter.

The Rossington Hall project, which was backed by the Professional Golfers Association European Tour, was expected to create 14,000 jobs and was supported by Doncaster councillors.

But the scheme ran into opposition from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

and the council's own planners.

Douglas Hall's company, Cameron Hall Developments, which has a majority shareholding in the company behind the Rossington Hall project said it had no comment on the police inquiry except to say that it was a "well-established and highly-respected development company".

The investigation into Doncaster began last April after serious concerns about the financial management of the local authority were highlighted by the District Auditor. In 1993 council officials revealed that they were being bullied by councillors over planning matters.

Detectives are investigating

expenses irregularities, questionable awards of contracts and controversial planning matters. One councillor, two contractors and one council official have been arrested in connection with the inquiry. Five senior councillors have been suspended by the Labour party.

Last night Detective Chief Supt Mick Burdiss, of South Yorkshire CID, who is heading the inquiry, said: "The rules of local government are well set down and very strict. In Doncaster there is a lot of evidence that these rules have not been applied and they have been abused by councillors and senior officials. That is very serious."

Sir John's dream, page 4

Clip Murdoch's wings, senior MPs tell Blair

By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

PRESSURE is growing on Tony Blair from senior Labour MPs to back new laws on press freedom to limit the power of Rupert Murdoch over the British media.

Clipping Mr Murdoch's wings would be one way of answering the claims that Mr Blair is "cosying up" to Mr Murdoch. There are quite a few MPs who are deeply concerned about Murdoch and want to stop him. There is a considerable feeling

that we want to do something about Murdoch," said Clive Soley, chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Action to preserve a diverse press to challenge Mr Murdoch's influence could also be used to head off the threat of a Labour backbench revolt on the Competition Bill, over a clause to outlaw predatory pricing by the *Times*.

The Government has delayed the second reading of the Competition Bill until after Easter, but the controversy over Mr Murdoch's access to Mr

Blair continued to embarrass the Government after a weekend disclosure that a Labour official in charge of high value fundraising, Amanda Delew, had written a memorandum last May saying big business donors would want access to Mr Blair and Jonathan Powell, the No 10 Chief of Staff.

Senior Labour sources last night said that the reports of a revolt on the Competition Bill by 50 Labour MPs were "over the top - it will be a handful". But there is a growing call among party backbench leaders

for action. The MPs were alarmed at the apparent editorial interference by Mr Murdoch over the decision by HarperCollins, another Murdoch publishing house, to cancel the book by Chris Patten, the former Governor of Hong Kong, allegedly because it clashed with Mr Murdoch's business plans in China.

Tam Dalyell has already warned the whips he cannot support the Government, when it asks MPs to overturn a defeat in the Lords on an amendment to the Competition Bill to

outlaw predatory pricing. Mr Murdoch's senior executives have been mounting a counter-offensive at the Commons to reassure Labour MPs.

Peter Stothard, the editor of the *Times*, had a meeting last week with David Winnick and Robin Corbett, after they had criticised Mr Murdoch's influence in the Commons.

The Chief Executive of News International, which owns the *Times*, has called for a meeting this week with Mr Soley. But in spite of the assurances from Mr Murdoch's men, Labour MPs

are keen to see some action. Mr Soley said he did not believe the amendment by Lord McNally, the Liberal Democrat peer, outlawing predatory pricing, would work, and Mr Murdoch would circumvent existing laws. "I would like to see media legislation," he said. "Clause one would be on a free press and everything else would be set out - privacy, harassment, and media ownership. This is not just a can of beans we are talking about."

Fund-raiser at centre of row, page 8

Sport section



THE return of Paul Gascoigne (above) to English club football was far from cheerful. He was booked for his own club as Middlesbrough lost the Coca-Cola Cup final 2-0 to Chelsea. In Brazil Mika Hakkinen and David Coulthard ran up a second grand prix one-two for McLaren. In Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Silk Cut finished first in the sixth leg of the Whitbread Round the World Race.

Naked in a cage for 5 years for knife attack

By Marcus Tanner

HIS CRIME was to attack a policeman with a knife 10 years ago in China's southern province of Guangdong. His punishment has been to be kept naked in a cage for five years, hobbled by shackles round his legs. The case was over brought to trial because he was deemed mentally ill.

The Chinese reporters who discovered Deng Qilu said he quickly gobbled the food they passed through the bars, muttering that he hadn't been fed for two days, or perhaps three. Even in country with as erratic a human rights record as

China's, the revelation that the authorities in the countryside still rely on the same kind of savage methods towards the mentally unbalanced that were used by their ancestors in feudal times has come as a shock.

The newspaper that broke the story, the *Yingcheng Evening News*, published two photographs of Deng and daringly remarked that "some" local police regarded his detention as inhumane. "There is no sign the authorities are going to handle this case appropriately," it noted. "How much longer will Deng Qilu 'live' in a cage?"

The answer is... no one really knows. For Deng Qilu's nightmarish sojourn is not the

result of some bureaucratic bungles. The tiny prison, constructed of steel bars and concrete pipes, was first set up beside a sewage ditch outside a village police station. Later, the newspaper said, the police had it towed to a courtyard belonging to Deng's family, where it cowered stands underneath a banana tree.

Asked by reporters why he was in a cage, the man answered: "They don't allow me to talk." A police spokesman contacted by the newspaper said: "Maybe they locked him away to stop him hitting people."

China's authorities have made much of recent alleged improvements to their judicial



The newspaper front page story of Deng Qilu

system, and of a growing commitment to the rule of law. And in one sense, the mere fact the case of Deng Qilu was published at all is a good sign, another indication that the country's once slavish press is beginning to investigate and expose social ills.

Today's news

Israel to stay in Lebanon

"Despite all the honeyed words... Israel is not going to withdraw a single soldier from its occupation zone 60 miles south of Beirut." Robert Fisk, Page 11

Potter biography

DENNIS POTTER, who enjoyed stirring up controversy with his television dramas, continues to cause ructions among the literati after his death with allegations about his sexually predatory behaviour. Page 3



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Potter was no sex pest, says object of desire

By Kim Sengupta

DENNIS POTTER, who enjoyed stirring up controversy with his television dramas, continues to cause ructions among the literary after his death with allegations about his sexually predatory behaviour towards women writers.

The novelist Caroline Seebohm is reported to have claimed that the playwright wanted to establish a "three-way" relationship with her and his wife, and she was forced to go to America to get away from his "terrifying pestering".

But Margaret Forster, another writer who became the object of Mr Potter's attentions, believes he was basically a fantasist and his behaviour may have been misunderstood.

The sexuality of the author of *The Singing Detective* and *Penelope from Heaven* is expected to be examined in detail in an official biography by Humphrey Carpenter due out in September. It will reveal that Mr Potter was strongly attracted to Gina Bellman, whom he cast in *Blackeyes*, and also include claims about his relationship with his agent Judy Daisch, although Ms Daisch denies there was ever an affair.

Ms Seebohm, who wrote *The Last Roman*, a 1987 novel about Oxford undergraduates, is reported in a Sunday newspaper as saying she was relentlessly pursued by Mr Potter in the mid 1960s. The playwright, who had married his childhood sweetheart Margaret, became so demanding that she fled to the US to be followed by a stream of passionate letters.

Mr Potter began to suffer from a crippling arthritic dis-

ease, and said Ms Seebohm was curing him in "some kind of religious way". She, however, felt it was "emotional blackmail", she was being "psychologically damaged" and needed to get away, the report claims.

Margaret Forster, the author of the novel *Georgy Girl* and the biographer of Daphne Du Maurier, also received a long letter from Potter in 1977 in which he talked about how he had been besotted with her since appearing together in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in Oxford in the 1960s. The letter had the drawing of a heart next to her name. He wrote "The pest is not just a foreign country, it's an enchanted land".

But Ms Forster, who is married to the writer Hunter Davies, told *The Independent* yesterday: "I think it would be a misunderstanding to think this was a love letter. Don't forget Dennis Potter was a writer, and writers and artists do sometimes send letters and use phrases which other people wouldn't. There was the drawing of the heart, but one shouldn't read everything into it. May be he was just being sarcastic when he talked about my looks."

"I don't think Dennis Potter was this great philanderer he is being made out to be, and his plays reflected his personal life. I think he was actually a fantasist and the whole thing got blown out of all proportions." "I don't recall him being much of a philanderer at Oxford, he certainly did not try anything with me. His fiancée, Margaret, was with him almost all the time and I spent more time talking to her than him. Dennis seemed more interested in politics than sex."



Kindred spirits: Meg Ryan plans to write and star in a new biopic of tortured poet Sylvia Plath

Sweet Meg gets serious with agony of Sylvia Plath

Saccharine Hollywood star battles against image to play tortured poet

IN THE NEWS

MEG RYAN

MEG RYAN made the Hollywood big league by playing quirky, neurotic women in romantic comedies. Now, it seems, she is fed up with her wholesome image. Her next project is to produce and star in a film about Sylvia Plath, the poet and feminist icon.

Apart, perhaps, from Goldie Hawn, it is difficult to conceive of an unlikely actress to play the tortured Plath, who committed suicide in 1963 while married to Ted Hughes, now poet laureate.

But according to industry gossip, the star of *When Harry Met Sally* and *Sleepless in Seattle* is fixated by Plath and has ordered numerous copies of *Birthday Letters*, the recently published volume of poems in which Hughes finally gives his perspective on their turbulent marriage.

Ryan's commitment to the venture represents not only a professional volte-face. It also confirms suspicions that her carefully cultivated off-screen persona - cutesy, vulnerable, unsophisticated - is just a facade and that she is, in reality, a tough businesswoman. For one thing, she is aware that Hughes jealously defends Plath's memory and that, as executor of her literary estate, he has taken robust action against such works as unauthorised biographies. She has, reportedly, assembled legions of lawyers to fend off any attempts to block the film.

Ryan, 36, is now far more than just a bankable actress. Through her own production company, Prufrock Pictures, which she set up in 1992, she has become a Hollywood powerbroker. She is writing the script

for the Plath movie herself. "What Ryan wants, she gets," said one industry insider.

A friend of Hughes said yesterday: "I can't imagine that he will be overjoyed by the prospect of this latest film."

For all that she gushes in interviews - about her wonderful husband, film star Dennis Quaid, her adorable son, Jack Henry, their 200-acre ranch in Montana - there are subjects that she refuses to address.

Her mother, Susan Jordan, for instance, Ryan has not spoken to her for nearly 10 years, not even when she underwent surgery for breast cancer. Jordan, who has never met her grandson, said in a bitter newspaper article a few years ago: "The image she (Ryan) has of the innocent, dizzy girl-next-door could not be further from the truth. In real life, she's a cold-hearted, cruel manipulator." The gossipmongers say she never forgave her mother for leaving the family home in Fairfield, Connecticut, to pursue an acting career, leaving her husband, Harry Hyra, to bring up Ryan - then known as Peggy - and her three siblings.

Last year, she told an interviewer: "I admire Sylvia Plath because she was fighting the good fight in her head, trying to survive day by day." Ryan will not give up her project without a fight.

MOST MEMORABLE SCENE

In *When Harry Met Sally*, Ryan played Sally, a woman who is initially hostile to Harry, but eventually falls in love with him. The scene where they first meet is particularly memorable.

see naked bodies writhing around."

Most unlikely roles: In *The Doors*, Ryan played Jim Morrison's drug-addicted girlfriend. She was equally convincing as a Gulf War officer in *George Washington*, as an alcoholic in *When Harry Met Sally*, and as a deranged woman in *Blackeyes*.

LADLE ON THE SYRUP

On motherhood: "I spend so much time changing nappies and I love it. On Dennis Quaid: "It's easy to be in a marriage with someone who does what you do if you respect him, and Dennis is an amazing actor." Quaid on Ryan: "She's vibrant and positive."



Plath: Ryan's target

Brighton's gay men ignore advice on safe sex

By Jay Merrick

GAYS in one of Britain's main hotspots for HIV-transmission are still practising widespread unsafe sex, according to the largest survey conducted of the homosexual community.

Project Zorro, a survey of the sexual lifestyle of gay men comes at a time when Brighton's HIV infection rate has increased at 12 times the national average.

Gay activists claim that anti-HIV spending has often not been clearly targeted at gay men, despite the fact that most infections involve them. In Brighton, the figure is 90 per cent.

Zorro researchers, whose report was largely funded by the local gay business community, collated evidence from 1,200 gay and bisexual men in the town, producing unequivocal evidence that widespread knowledge of safe sex practices was not matched by actual sexual habits. An estimated one in three sexual acts was unsafe.

A quarter of gay men sur-

veyed did not know or ask about the HIV status of their sexual partners; at least three-quarters, including a significant slice of these in long-term relationships, indulged in casual sex with "trade"; many thought HIV infection levels were static or even falling; the use of Aids helplines was minimal; and gay men tended to avoid using clinics for sexually trans-

mitted diseases (STDs). James Ledward, a Project Zorro organiser, described Zorro's key findings as "deeply disturbing."

"What the research shows very strongly is that gay men do not associate themselves with HIV. We're paying the price for everybody thinking it was sussed here. But it isn't."

'We're paying the price for everybody thinking it was sussed here. Gay men do not associate themselves with HIV'

The only HIV prevention measure that received a qualified thumbs-up was the health authority's annual distribution of tens of thousands of condoms. "They've been doing it the same way for 10 years and it's now clear it isn't working," said Mr Ledward. "So something new has to be tried. They should work with gay community groups to put HIV back on

problems and less than £80,000 was targeted on gay men, who accounted for 60 per cent of all HIV cases. In the north west London boroughs of Brent and Harrow, the lion's share of prevention is directed to ethnic issues despite the fact that the majority of HIV infections involve gay or bisexual men.

East Sussex Health Authority spent £5.7m on HIV and Aids prevention and care last year, and will spend £7.4m in 1998-99. With increasingly large tranches used for important drug treatments, spending on prevention has remained static at £1.1m. Of that, about £750,000 is supposedly ringfenced for gay men, bisexuals and injecting drug users.

Today, Mr Ledward and the Project Zorro committee will ask East Sussex Health Authority to appoint a gay HIV prevention co-ordinator; direct about £50,000 into prevention activities and establish a specifically gay STD clinic. The health authority said it did not wish to comment in advance of the publication of the report.

Camelot rapped over number blunder

By Clare Garner

THE National Lottery organisers, Camelot, were yesterday warned that there must not be another blunder following a costly error on the debut of its TV scratchcard show.

The Lottery watchdog, Oflot, has taken a firm stance with Camelot, insisting that a serious mishap such as the one which occurred on last night's live show must never happen again. They have told the multi-million pound lottery organisers that no charities must suffer due to the error when the wrong set of balls was fed into a lottery machine prompting another draw to be made after the show had been screened.

The BBC2 programme,

called *The National Lottery Big Ticket* and screened for the first time on Saturday night, has already been criticised for breaching BBC guidelines. The programme, which incorporates the weekly National Lottery draw, depends on people buying TV Dream scratchcards for a chance to be on the show and compete for a £100,000 jackpot.

Oflot has launched an official inquiry into the operation which is estimated will cost hundreds of thousands of pounds in extra pay-outs. A spokesman for Oflot said: "We are concerned about what happened and have made it clear to Camelot that this must not happen again. We were also concerned that charities do not

suffer, but Camelot is bearing the full cost of the error."

The error was due to a problem with machine number three in the draw when balls numbered between 21 and 40 were used instead of a full set of numbers from 21 to 50, according to a spokeswoman for Camelot. "We did not realise until after the third draw," she said. "Auditors from Oflot and Price Waterhouse were present for another draw after the show which included balls numbered from 21 to 50."

After the first draw, the programme - hosted by Anthea Turner and comedian Patrick Kielty on BBC1 - went back to its pre-recorded format. The Camelot spokeswoman added: "We will honour both sets of

numbers. It will mean that in effect, two sets of numbers were drawn instead of one."

The first set of numbers was 49, 11, 35, and 55, but was later amended to 49, 11, 31, and 55 after the third number was re-selected. Viewers stood to win varying amounts if they had had any of the balls in the right order. They won £10 for the first ball, £50 for the first two, £1,000 for the first three and £50,000 for the fourth.

All extra pay-outs will come out of Camelot profits, but the full extent of the cost will not be known until after the 16-week programme has ended.

Saturday's winning National Lottery numbers were: 11, 13, 23, 28, 29, 37, bonus 8.

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How 'Donnygate' knocked Sir John's dream off course

SET IN acres of green Yorkshire countryside, the Victorian splendour of Rossington Hall is a symbol of hope to the children with special needs who go there to learn.

But to Newcastle tycoon Sir John Hall the listed building was the ideal centrepiece for his £200m regeneration plan to create one of the largest leisure and business complexes in the north of England.

Rossington Hall was to become the Yorkshire version of Wynn Hall - the Hall family's 5,300-acre estate south of Newcastle.

Sir John's son Douglas, who last week quit as vice-chairman of Newcastle United after making adverse comments about supporters and Newcastle women, was made chairman of Rossington Hall Investments, the firm behind the project.

The council-owned school building was to be the clubhouse for a championship golf course which would be part of the European professional tour. The plan included enclaves of highly exclusive "fairway" homes, strategically positioned in and around the golf course.

Told that the 2,300-acre scheme would create 14,000 jobs, Doncast-

lan Burrell and Tim Laxton on the part played by the Geordie tycoon in Yorkshire regeneration

er council, led by insurance salesman Gordon Gallimore, embraced the project when it was proposed in 1991. The councillors wanted to sell Rossington Hall to the developers, conditional on planning permission being obtained. The scheme was approved by the council in January 1995 and referred to the Department of the Environment.

But Doncaster's progress towards regeneration was dealt a devastating blow last year, when allegations emerged of serious corruption within the council. The scandal was dubbed Donnygate.

In December, Mr Gallimore, then chairman of the Doncaster North Constituency Labour Party and chairman of the Doncaster Regional Committee for the Co-operative Retail Society, was suspended from the party amid allegations that he had accepted an inappropriate gift from Doncaster 2000, a joint venture property company in which the council was involved.

The brains behind the Rossington Hall scheme was Malcolm Clark, 58, a chartered surveyor and chairman of the Rossington Labour party. Mr Clark, like Sir John Hall, had cut his teeth in property as a surveyor for the National Coal Board.

In 1991, Mr Clark joined RHI, which had been set up in the name of his wife Kathleen, their son Julian and two directors of Professional Golf Association European Tours.

The same day that Mr Clark took up his new position, Cameron Hall Developments, then controlled by Sir John, took a 76 per cent stake in the company and Douglas Hall was made chairman. Douglas became chairman of Cameron Hall in 1993, and took his father's majority shareholding in the company last year.

The remaining 24 per cent stake in RHI was taken by another company, Designaim, also set up by Kathleen and Julian Clark. Mr Clark joined them as a director and shareholder after leaving the Co-op.

The planning battle to make the dream of Rossington Hall into a reality has lasted nearly seven years. During this period, RHI has battled hard to get across its point of view and has run up costs over £1.8m.

Mr Clark, who has worked tirelessly on the scheme, has earned over £400,000 in consultancy fees paid by RHI to Designaim and another company he controls, Designaim Developments.

In 1993, Rossington Hall and four other unconnected residential sites were included in the Doncaster Unitary Development Plan, which marked out the blueprint for the town's future.

Then, despite council support, the project was dealt a seemingly mortal blow last year by a DoE inspector whose inquiry into the scheme found major faults and said it was contrary to national and regional planning guidance.

Mr Clark is still trying to resurrect the scheme - now as a 2,500-jobs project - but the council, which has undergone radical changes in the last year, has withdrawn its support. Last week he was uncontactable, believed to be holidaying in Barbados.



Sir John Hall (left) with Gordon Gallimore, the leader of Doncaster borough council in January 1995 when the council approved the Rossington Hall project
Photograph: Roy Ingram

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Straw orders inquiry over security blunder on Blairs' home

JACK STRAW, the Home Secretary, yesterday ordered an immediate inquiry after sensitive documents about Tony Blair's constituency home were made available to the public in an apparent security blunder.

Complete files on plans to protect the Blairs' Victorian home in Trimdon, County Durham, have reportedly been available at the public records office at Sedgefield District Council.

The *Sunday Times* said yesterday it had seen a planning application detailing proposed security arrangements at the Blairs' home, made within days of Labour's general election victory last May. For £11.75, a reporter was able to view this security "blueprint" at the records office and was even allowed to draw sketches. The application revealed a secret route so the Blairs could escape a terrorist attack and the location of almost a dozen infra-red cameras and motion sensors to detect intruders in the garden. Yesterday a Home Office spokesman said Mr Straw had asked for the material to be withdrawn.

John Stalker, former deputy chief constable of Greater Manchester Police and an expert on terrorism, said detailed security arrangements on the Blair family home would be "absolutely priceless" to a terrorist cell.

Fears grow for boy lost on loch

CONCERN is growing for the safety of a 16-year-old boy who disappeared after the boat he was sailing in capsized in the freezing waters of Loch Lomond.

A police air-and-sea search for Stephen McCallum, of Kirkintilloch, has so far failed to trace the teenager who has been missing since 1am yesterday morning. His friend Stephen Smith, 17, who was also in the dinghy, managed to swim to shore to raise the alarm. Yesterday Inspector William Brown of Strathclyde Police, who is co-ordinating the search, said: "We are continuing an extensive search of the area." The boys had been camping with about 20 friends on the west shore of the loch near the holiday village of Tarbet.

Compensation for truck drivers

BRITISH lorry drivers who were caught up in French farmers' strikes have been told they will finally receive compensation for their loss of earnings, it was revealed today.

The news could mark the end of a year-and-a-half battle by the Road Haulage Association to gain compensation for the lorry drivers affected by the industrial actions in 1996 and 1997. But in a press statement today, the RHA said it remained "cautious" about the news despite negotiating a new compensation formula with French officials in January this year.

The negotiations followed December's landmark judgement by the European Court of Justice against the French government for breaching the rules of the single market and failing to stop protesting farmers. More than 1,000 British truck drivers were stuck in the week-long disputes which brought France to a standstill. It cost haulage firms millions and 24 independent drivers went bankrupt as a result of the action. So far the French Government has only paid-out four payments totalling £800 to four individual British companies. It has been estimated that total compensation will exceed £1.5m.

Yates fights Hutchence verdict

PAULA YATES said yesterday she was seeking legal advice in a bid to overturn a coroner's verdict of suicide on her lover Michael Hutchence.

Miss Yates, 37, said she refused to accept that the INXS singer committed suicide and said that Hutchence thought it was the most cowardly act in the world. "In no way do I accept the coroner's verdict of suicide," she told Australia's Channel 9 network's 60 Minutes programme. She added that although Hutchence was depressed, their baby Heavenly Hiraani Tiger Lily was his great reason to live. "He wouldn't have left her - never, never, never, never," New South Wales Coroner Derek Hand found in February that Hutchence, 37, committed suicide while in a state of depression, partly over Ms Yates's child custody dispute with Bob Geldof, her former husband. Ms Yates was speaking during a trip to Australia, in which she visited suite 524 at Sydney's Ritz-Carlton Hotel where Hutchence died.

'It fell off the back of a lorry, guv'

A NATION of Arthur Daleys was revealed today in research which showed one person in 10 admits to buying stolen property in the past five years.

Among young men, nearly half had either bought or been offered "dodgy" goods. The market in stolen property sold in pubs and clubs, door-to-door and through dishonest shopkeepers is worth at least a billion pounds a year, the Home Office study found. Home Office minister Alan Michael vowed to crack down on the illicit deals, by developing tactics which would make stolen goods "too hot to handle", and called on potential purchasers to insist on seeing proof of ownership of any goods. Kent police will pioneer a scheme to try to reduce burglaries by making it too hard to sell the goods taken.

Soaring sterling: Cheaper imports are on offer due to the strength of the currency and turbulence in South-east Asian markets – but exporters are suffering

Strong pound brings Britons bargain breaks

By Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

BRITISH consumers can look forward to a summer of bargains thanks to the strong pound. At home clothing, footwear and electrical goods will be better value, while on holiday they will be able to buy more for their money.

Economists said yesterday that the pound was likely to remain strong until the end of the year, meaning that consumers have some time to take advantage of the situation.

"The pound has got strong very quickly," said Michael Hughes, group economic adviser to Barclays Capital. "By virtue of that some people are not aware of what's going on."

Adam Cole, UK economist for HSBC, said: "With goods such as electrical products and clothing the trend is quite clearly downwards." He added: "Wages, on the other hand, are going up so this boosts consumer spending."

Clive Vaughan of Verdict Research said the most striking difference would be not that goods got cheaper but that consumers would get better

quality for the same price. He added: "We have done a lot of work on footwear and retailers are saying that because of the strong pound the quality of the product is going to be better."

"So, for example, the inside of the shoe is more likely to be leather and the workmanship is better."

"The same is true for clothing. You are more likely to find Italian styling at a very, very competitive price. We also expect to see great value for money on electrical goods because of a combination of the strong pound with the problems in South-east Asia."

Demand in a lot of Asian countries is expected to fall because of the currency difficulties. The financial turbulence means that overseas sales will be more important and keener prices will follow to make sure sales are maintained.

Other imports that may fall in price are cars and wine. "But that may not necessarily be the case because the price reductions may not be passed on to the consumer by the retailer," said Mr Hughes.

"The car market is fairly buoyant at the moment so the

retailers may not feel the need to pass the cut prices on. So you may not see your Mercedes getting cheaper."

The other way that consumers will benefit is when they go abroad. "We are getting very unusual complaints," said Jackie Gibson of the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA).

"There are some people who have booked early and then the second editions of the brochure have come out with cheaper prices, as people have taken advantage of the different exchange rate. Some of the companies have offered refunds although others haven't."

She said that those on self-catering holidays would reap the benefits. "The average amount we spend on holiday is almost as much as the holiday itself costs – we spend on average £360 on holiday and £320 cash when we are there. The biggest value is going to be on things you actually spend out there."

She said that particular areas people should look out for were Greece and South-east Asia. Mr Hughes agreed. "Too many hotels have been built in South-east Asia and so you can get four or five star hotels at low prices," he said.

"For instance, a hotel which would normally cost £220 a night you could get for £75. There are also a lot of competitive flights to that region."

"Sterling is also stronger against European currencies than the dollar so you won't get many bargains in America," he added.

Sunworld said that there "had never been a better time to head for Greece," with drachma standing \$24.42 to the pound. Dinner for two costs on average \$4.75 per person and a bottle of suntan lotion £2.86. Buying wine and beer at a supermarket would work out at £1.90 for the wine and 38p for the beer.

Lunn Poly said that City Breaks to European cities were also proving popular because of the strong pound.

However, there is some less welcome news for consumers. "The disadvantage is that the longer the pound stays strong the worse news it is for British industry," said Adam Cole.

"Exports are not as strong and the implications are that employers may be looking at the number of people they employ."



Take it easy: The strength of the pound will give a big boost to the purchasing power of British tourists, particularly in Greece after the devaluation of the drachma and in Asia where hotel rates have plummeted

Fearful fashion groups predict collapse

By Nigel Cope

FASHION groups are worried that the combination of the strong pound and financial turmoil in the Far East could bring some of the industry's top names to the brink of collapse.

Many have been caught by the double whammy of the rising UK currency, which is making their goods more expensive in export markets, and the virtual disintegration of the Far Eastern luxury goods sector. Countries such as Japan, Singapore and Malaysia have traditionally proved a lucrative source of income for fashion houses and luxury goods companies, but most Far Eastern consumers can no longer afford the prices.

One director of a top UK fashion group says: "At the top (luxury) end I would say there is risk of collapse is quite high." Another UK retailer said: "I would not be surprised to see a top fashion name – European or American – fall victim to all this."

He added that selling luxury goods in the Far East was once too impossible. "The top end of the market has just disappeared. It has almost got to the stage where it doesn't matter how much you charge for things. People aren't going to buy them anyway."

The deteriorating trading conditions have already caused some top UK houses severe problems. Mulberry, the British luxury goods group which makes luggage and filofaxes, has issued a series of profit warnings because its exports to markets such as Japan have been hit so hard. Burberry, famous for its raincoats and trademark checked scarves, has been another victim. Its sales in the Far East have been affected while sales in its UK shops have been hit by lower tourist spending because the strong currency has made its merchandise so expensive.

The companies hit hardest are those that manufacture in the UK and export to European and Far Eastern markets. Firms that buy goods from the Far East at least get the benefit of the strong pound in reverse. They are able to source their goods more cheaply in the Far East because the UK currency now has so much more buying power. Mulberry recently decided to close a factory in Somerset and move more manufacturing to European markets such as Spain.

SPENDING POWER IN EUROPE

The devalued drachma means Athens is now the best value-for-money city for visiting Britons.

Tourists taking trips to the Greek capital are now getting 26 per cent more drachmas to the pound than a year ago.

Next best value cities are Dublin (offering 19.1 per cent better exchange rates) and Lisbon (up 15.28 per cent), according to figures compiled by American Express. John Howells, the company's UK and Ireland foreign exchange director, said: "The growth of sterling means that spending money will go a lot further this spring."

He went on: "Every element of the holiday will be affected – accommodation, transport, entry to museums and galleries as well as eating and drinking."

Here are the top value-for-money cities showing how much further the pound will go in March 1998 compared with March 1997

CITY	INCREASE IN SPENDING POWER
Athens	+26.31%
Dublin	+19.17%
Lisbon	+15.28%
Amsterdam	+13.86%
Berlin	+13.70%
Brussels	+13.67%
Madrid	+13.62%
Paris	+12.91%
Rome	+11.53%
Geneva	+7.90%

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A Thought for Easter

"For all the happiness mankind can gain is not in pleasure but rest from pain."

John Dryden (1631-1700)

Day after day, night after night you have helped us to provide rest from pain.

May the happiness gained be yours as well this Easter and always.

Sister Superior

Wave goodbye to guilt to boost your feel-good factor

By Jeremy Laurence
Health Editor

BON VIVEURS enjoy better health than their guilt-ridden peers, despite their questionable habits. In a study of the balance between pleasure and guilt, psychologists have found that while eating and drinking to excess is foolhardy, being merry goes some way to compensate for the damage.

Researchers from Hull University asked 300 people to list their main sources of enjoyment

and record their feelings about them. They were also questioned about their health. The results showed that people who rated their pleasures highly had fewer episodes of colds and flu and went to the doctor less while those with more guilty feelings were more susceptible to illness.

The survey contained some surprises. Sex and shopping were rated equally highly for pleasure, but shopping was associated with more guilt. Eating chocolate and watching

Neighbours on TV produced high levels of guilt. Having bubble baths and, surprisingly, flirting, were the only highly pleasurable activities that were rated entirely guilt-free.

Some respondents named unusual sources of pleasure such as fighting and winding people up. Smoking cannabis was highly rated for pleasure and brought little guilt.

Dr Geoff Lowe, who presented the findings to the British Psychological Society's annual conference in Brighton

yesterday, said the current dos and don'ts promoted by health educators could produce perverse effects.

"Maybe we should think more about pleasure and less about guilt. We have to have guilty feelings to turn us off those habits that are bad for us. But if we enjoy our pleasures and we don't feel bad about them, that may be better for our health. Enjoyment is good for us," he said.

Other research has shown that psychological well-being is

related to immune function and pleasure can enhance it. Chronic guilt may increase levels of stress hormones which are known to deplete immune function. He added that the importance of enjoyment applied even to behaviour which was acknowledged to be bad for health, like smoking. "If people smoke and get a lot of pleasure out of smoking and feel little guilt they may suffer fewer harmful effects than someone who smokes and feels guilty about it. There is then a

double whammy effect – they suffer the ill effects of smoking and those of feeling guilty about it."

Babies in the womb can distinguish an English folk dance tune from a Welsh lullaby and remember it weeks later after birth, psychologists claim.

Psychologists from the Universities of Keele and Bath played music to pregnant women from the 20th week of pregnancy and saw a visible response in the babies when it was played to them a fortnight af-

ter the birth. If confirmed, the finding suggests foetal learning begins weeks earlier than had been thought. Stephen Evans, who presented the findings to the British Psychological Society, said the findings had implications for the care of premature babies in hospital where they were exposed to noisy ventilators which could affect the development of their hearing. Efforts should be made to mimic more closely the environment of the mother's womb, he said.

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Falklands plagued by '40,000' landmines

By Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

LANDMINES left over from the Falklands war may prevent Britain from fulfilling its obligations under an international treaty banning the weapons.

Official figures say 14,000 anti-personnel mines have remained uncleared on the islands since the 1982 war, though some estimates have put the figure at nearer 40,000.

They are creating a major headache for Whitehall officials because Britain does not have the technology to clear them. Under the Ottawa Treaty, due to be ratified by MPs in the autumn, the UK will have 10 years to complete the work.

Attempts during the 1980s to develop equipment capable of detecting and clearing the mines were abandoned when it became clear that 100 per cent effectiveness could not be guaranteed. Islanders said they did not want to risk mine-clearers' lives in clearance operations when even a 1 per cent failure rate would mean they still could not use their land. Twenty square kilometres of beach and former farmland are out of bounds to islanders.

The problem is that the mines are plastic, and fiendishly difficult to detect. They are also buried in shingle and peaty soil which moves around and which makes using vehicles for the work very difficult.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence said Britain might have to ask for an extension to the 10 year clearance period. "Clearly we are committed to the Ottawa Treaty but the Falklands do present particular difficulties because of the nature of the terrain. We are

currently considering how to deal with this in the light of our treaty obligations," he said.

Yesterday the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency's technical manager with responsibility for the Royal Engineers' equipment said that although the latest technology might be adaptable to the job, he had not been asked to look into it yet. John Hambley said that during the 1980s, experts had looked at either burning or digging up the mines by remote control as well as at detecting them with ground-penetrating radar systems. However, all the methods had their drawbacks.

"The decision was made that it was better to leave the mines where they were. What we had was not going to be reliable enough, and it was still quite costly," he said.

The Royal Engineers have cleared about 1,400 mines since the war, mostly in sensitive areas. But they did so by lying on their stomachs and using probes, a painstaking and labour-intensive process. For example, they cleared a path to a windmill so that local people could gain access to carry out maintenance work.

Wendy Teggart, general manager of the Falkland Islands Government's London office, said the islanders had felt that even if the mines were cleared they might not be confident enough to use the land.

"As a Falkland Island mother myself I would not be happy with my children playing on an area that was cleared," she said. "With the best will in the world, someone could say they believed it was clear when it was not."



Play time: Warrant Officer Pete Hammonds (centre) and a colleague taking a break with some of the Bosnian children whose future they are trying to safeguard

Photograph
Jim Loring

Lethal legacy for the innocent victims of war

Army experts in crusade to help the children of Bosnia. Hazel Southam reports

IN THE central Bosnian town of Sipovo, 11-year-old Zora Kukilo has never heard of Diana, Princess of Wales, or her work against landmines. But her life may be saved because of that work.

Zora is among over 100 children who are being taught landmine awareness by the British Army. Her home and school were destroyed by Croats retreating from the area after the Dayton peace agreement two years ago.

She lives in the centre of a 500 square mile minefield. Army experts aren't sure of the exact number of mines which threaten the people of this poverty-stricken place, but there are an estimated 15 million in the country.

Zora has not yet seen a landmine. But she knows "they are dangerous," and would, she says, "go and tell Pete" if she found one.

Pete is Warrant Officer Pete Hammonds, who works with Staff Sgt Taff Meadows, of the Sixth Battalion REME, to educate the children about the hidden perils they face.

The children, mostly aged about seven years old, stand in an empty hall in their newly-rebuilt school. All that decorates it are a dozen pictures of Jesus, brown rabbits and fruit which they have drawn and glued to the windows.

They are dirty, poorly

dressed, with blackened milk teeth, and small for their age. A few have bright eyes, but most have the glazed expression of children who have simply seen too much pain. Charity workers say that every family in Sipovo lost at least one member during the war.

Sgt Meadows explains how landmines can kill or maim, shows them what the devices look like, and tells them how to escape from a minefield should they inadvertently stumble into one.

"You must get some stones and put them on the floor to show everybody that this is a minefield," he explains. "You

must go home and tell your parents or your teacher."

Sadly, it's not always as simple as that. Major Paul Sadler, anaesthetist at the nearby army field hospital, still remembers the day that a dozen children were rushed in having been injured while playing in a minefield. One six-year-old boy was dead on arrival, his right hand side blasted with shrapnel wounds. "It was very distressing. The injuries the landmine had caused were absolutely horrendous," he says.

Sgt Meadows asks his class if any of them have ever seen landmines before. Several report having seen devices in the

nearby Muslim village of Volari, which comes as a shock as only yesterday we watched children playing in the rough ground around burnt-out houses in an area which an elderly villager had told us was safe.

This perhaps explains the key to the British Army's landmine training scheme. The children see landmines when they play and are now being trained to be their parents' teachers, warning the adults of hidden death traps.

"They are the future for Sipovo," says the troops' commander, Major Graham Belgum, himself a father of two young children. "We must en-

sure their survival and so we have a vital role to play in educating them about the landmines they could discover. It's all about helping them have a future."

But there are massive burdens to overcome. Sgt Meadows recalled talking a group of teenagers who said they helped their fathers plant landmines around their homes and land as a protection against the retreating Croats.

"Planting landmines is normal for them," says Sgt Meadows. "But I'm aiming at the children because they are the ones who will make changes in the future. Hopefully, when they are grown up they won't want to plant landmines any more."

STUDENT CHOICES

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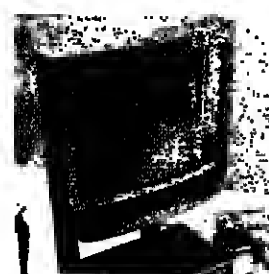
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Robertson digs in to guard defence budget

By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

A PEACE dividend for hospitals and schools has been ruled out by the Defence Secretary's refusal to slash his department's £22bn budget.

George Robertson's decision, following a six-month strategic review, will dismay many Labour MPs and disappoint some ministers, who are seeking more money for health and education in the Treasury's

comprehensive review of spending. Ministerial colleagues have told *The Independent* that they expected defence to be cut to fund higher spending elsewhere. But Mr Robertson is said to have the backing of Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson against any attempt to raid his budget.

Friends of Mr Robertson said Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development, also supported the case for continued defence spending. "Clare takes the view

that there is still a case for a strong force in order to meet the peace-keeping duties," said a source.

Mr Robertson will tomorrow underline the need for powerful defence forces by setting out plans for extending their role to "defence diplomacy and conflict resolution". He will use the Winston Churchill memorial lecture in Luxembourg to advance the case for using armed forces to prevent conflicts, and for Britain's military strength to be used in new,

more constructive ways in future. The new role will not come cheaply, Mr Robertson will make clear when he submits his plans to a cabinet committee. He will tell colleagues that he will be making cuts in some areas of defence, including forces in Germany, but will insist on keeping the savings for new defence contracts for helicopters and ships - possibly to include two new aircraft carriers. He plans to cut the defence reserve forces, and withdraw troops

and tanks from Germany in order to spend more money on beefing up the air and sea-lift capability.

Tanks could be mothballed near ports as part of a "park and fight" strategy. The out-dated Cold War strategy of fighting a frontal tank attack across Germany will be abandoned, but not all the tank forces will be withdrawn, to underline Britain's continued commitment to European defence with the US through Nato. The Tory defence cuts slimmed

down the armed forces in their existing roles, but Mr Robertson is planning a radical shift to a more mobile, hard-hitting force. He will tell cabinet colleagues that in order to sustain the forces in areas such as the Gulf, he needs more back-up capability. "The Tories kept saying they were cutting the tail without blunting the teeth, but it was a false analogy. They were cutting the lifeblood of the forces," said a source.

Britain will go ahead with the Eu-

rofighter project, in spite of Treasury opposition, and keep its nuclear commitment, but the Government is to wipe out a quarter of Britain's nuclear defence force tomorrow to honour Labour's election promise on disarmament. The Ministry of Defence said that all the outdated RAF freefall WE-177 N-Bombs will be removed at midnight, leaving the Trident submarine fleet as Britain's nuclear force.

Leading article, page 20

Robin and Gaynor name their big day

By Colin Brown

ROBIN COOK and his lover, Gaynor Regan, yesterday posed for photographs after confirming they are to be married on 19 April at Chevening, the Foreign Secretary's grace and favour residence in Kent.

"I am delighted that we are getting married at Chevening," he said. "It has given us rare intervals of privacy and we both think it right that our wedding should be where we have had our most peaceful times together."

"The last couple of months have been difficult for both of us but our commitment is greater and our love is deeper because of the experiences we have been through together."

"I hope our marriage will show that the true story of my private life is that it's a very content and fulfilled life with the woman I want to make as happy as she makes me."

The house, once a country retreat for the Prince of Wales, was admired by his ex-wife, Margaret, before their marriage break-up, which ended in divorce last month after 28 years. The taxpayer will not be picking up the bill.

The wedding clashes with Tony Blair's trip to the Middle East, so the Prime Minister will not be able to attend. However, the couple are planning a larger reception in London in the weeks after the wedding ceremony and it is possible that Mr Blair will attend that.



Happy couple: Robin Cook with his partner Gaynor Regan at his official residence, Chevening House in Kent, yesterday

Photograph: PA

Tories told to be more open

By Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

THE Conservatives have spurned the focus groups and spin doctors of New Labour, choosing instead to rely on the carefully targeted marketing strategies of businesses like the Asda supermarket chain.

At the final meeting of the old Conservative Central Council in Harrogate on Saturday, grassroots party activists were given a startling presentation by Bob Tyrrell, Professor of Strategic Marketing at the City University Business School, London.

Professor Tyrrell comforted his predominantly middle-aged audience with an analysis showing that in the run up to the next election there would be a dramatic fall in the number of people aged between mid-20s and mid-30s, while there will be a similar sized increase in the those aged 55 to 64.

"Perhaps some of the things more traditionally associated with conservatism will begin naturally to come into their own," he said. "Wisdom, reflection, sobriety, loyalty and tradition, as we become a more middle-aged culture."

But Professor Tyrrell said the Tories needed to become more open and accessible.

"A few years ago," he said, "I did some work on why Sainsbury's appeared to have fallen out of favour, and the cheeky chappies from Asda and places like that appeared to be doing so well."

That comment was greeted by laughter because Archie Norman, the boss of Asda, is now a Conservative MP, a vice-chairman of the party, and a driving force behind the creation of William Hague's new Conservative Party.

A package of democratically based reforms was overwhelmingly passed on Saturday by the one third of the 350,000 party members who bothered to vote.

Professor Tyrrell said that one of the reasons Sainsbury's had suffered was that it gave an impression of being detached, "of not having an ear to the ground - by contrast, as I say to one of your party vice-chairmen, you're going in the right direction".

That direction was set earlier in the day by Mr Hague when he indicated the target group of voters for his new policy - "people who don't have much time for transient, passing fashion".

"These are conservative people, their values, their instincts are ours. Our task is to win back their trust."

Although Mr Hague said he was about to embark on a journey to become the party of One Nation, he made no mention of the unemployed, the poor, lone parents, the disabled, or the socially excluded in his speech.

Fund-raiser at the centre of big-business row still in post

By Colin Brown

THE LABOUR official described by party spokesmen as "politically naive" and "middle ranking" after weekend disclosures over big-business donors wanting access to Number 10, is still in charge of "high-value" fundraising, it emerged yesterday.

Amanda Delew, nicknamed "De Lute" by colleagues, is one of the two "high-value" fundraisers for the party at the Millbank headquarters. Chris Smith, Culture, Media and Sport Secretary, played down the significance of the internal document written by Ms Delew in May after Labour's election victory and leaked to a Sunday paper, which said big donors would expect access to Number 10.

"The moment it got anywhere near senior officials they said this is completely inappropriate, not something that any party - any government - should do." It was leaked to embarrass Tony Blair in the wake of reports that he had offered access to Rupert Murdoch.

The officials said Ms Delew was "politically naive" and not head of the department. The memo was so obviously inappropriate that it was "binned" by the head of her unit, a source said. But Ms Delew, who aimed to raise £15m by 2002, is still a leading player in the search for big donations.

She wrote a memo which said: "Major donors expect to be invited to Number 10; if this cannot take place then income levels may be affected."

David Heathcoat Amory,

shadow chief secretary to the treasury, said he would be writing to the Cabinet Secretary asking for an investigation into what he described as "the cash for access scandal".

"Labour's plans to use Number 10 as a fund-raising venue is an abuse of office. It is yet further evidence of their arrogance and contempt for accepted standards of probity. Labour's high-value donors programme appears to be intended to be a 'Gold access card' to the Prime Minister."

Those charges were denied by Labour Party sources, who said that Downing Street was not used for party fundraising events. "It would be wrong to use taxpayers' hospitality to raise party funds, but it does raise the question about what is acceptable," said a source.

Ms Delew is on maternity leave and is shortly to have a baby. She was shocked to see her memo leaked 10 months after it was binned.

In her early 30s, Ms Delew is a committed member of the Labour Party. Her background is in fundraising for charities.

A friend said: "She is very professional, and personable but her background is in fundraising, not party politics."

Her memorandum was sent to a limited number of people within the Labour Party office at John Smith House, before officials moved to Millbank Tower.

There are fears within the party that it was leaked by someone who may have been disenchanted at being sacked after the election, as the party had to cut down its staffing numbers.

Field plans boost for the over-75s

By Colin Brown

PENSIONERS over 75 are likely to get an extra bonus to deal with poverty, Frank Field signalled yesterday, but the social security minister did not support a restoration of the link between pensions and earnings.

Mr Field, who is due receive a report on the review of pensions within days, will disappoint pensioners' campaigners, led by Baroness Castle, the veteran Labour peer, who are calling for all state pensions to be raised substantially. The increase in state pensions well above the inflation level for those aged over 75 will be a cheaper way of tackling hardship where poverty is

greatest. "If you look at who are the poorest pensioners then in fact the older we get not only the frailer we get, the lower our income gets," Mr Field said.

Government sources also confirmed ministers were looking at special help for the over-75s. In the long term, there are signals ministers will seek to move most people on to compulsory top-up "stakeholder" pensions, requiring contributions of at least £1.2 a week extra to increase the payout in retirement.

Mr Field yesterday also said on BBC *On The Record* that he and Harriet Harman received letters from Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister's official spokesman, "telling both of us off" for per-

sonal clashes over the green paper on the reform of the welfare state.

Mr Field, who unveiled the document last week, yesterday said he believed it was "quite serious" to get a letter about the leaks from someone as senior as Mr Campbell.

"He certainly wasn't happy that briefing was going on and I think he had every right to say so and to write those letters," said Mr Field.

The reform package will help the Government to answer a warning yesterday by the independent think tank, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, that in spite of efforts by the Blair government to tackle social inequality, the gap between rich and poor remained wide.

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Space
a bit tight!

Baptism of fear that begins at the airstrip

PRAISE God I was never in the Russian army. I don't know which the poor conscripts sent to Afghanistan must have feared most, their guerrilla opponents or their own helicopter transports.

En route to the start point for our walk-in to Everest, we had head-splitting, body-shaking rattle through the hillsides in just such a machine.

Conditions for the 45-minute flight from Kathmandu to the Lukla airstrip were pretty good, with the snow-dusted peaks of the Himalayas marching to one side. But even so, when the helicopter was shrouded in cloud, there was an uncomfortable sensation that the terraced hillsides were only a few hundred metres below.

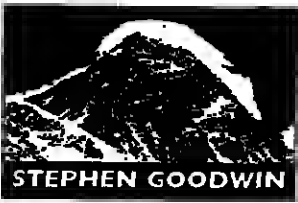
Then, as we climbed higher, tree-clad slopes and rocky ridges were alongside us. Exciting but not a form of flying I want to make a habit of.

Pilot Vachislav Ovcharenko and flight engineer Nicolai Shonarov had probably flown the shuddering machine in more hostile circumstances but the language barrier made it hard to be sure. Gold-toothed smiles were the response.

The Russian-built helicopter was crammed to capacity. The 24 passengers, including all our Himalayan Kingdoms Everest team, were strapped in on bench seats running along the sides and between us was piled rucksacks, barrels, mattresses and all the paraphernalia of expeditioning.

Our landing on the stony airstrip was surprisingly gentle. Lukla has a frightening reputation but it is light aircraft passengers who really get the scare. The short runway slopes down the hillside and arriving aircraft seem certain to slam into the hotel at its uphill end. The wife of Sir Edmund Hillary was killed in a crash here and bits of wreckage testify to other unhappy landings.

Lukla, perched at 2850 metres above the Dudh Kosi river, is just to the south of the Khumbu, the Sherpa homeland, and is the gateway to



STEPHEN GOODWIN
Everest Diary
Day Five

Everest. We walk at a leisurely pace, but this seeming sloth is deliberate. Altitude sickness can occur at any time above 2500 metres, and hurrying now could scupper a summit bid.

For four of our team, including myself, this is our first visit to Nepal. Crowded, polluted Kathmandu was hardly a culture shock to anyone who has travelled outside Europe, but up here, the head reels to take in the soaring natural beauty and cultural differences.

The dusty track that winds north from Lukla up the valley of the Dudh Kosi to the Sherpa capital of Namche Bazaar teems with bent bodies as the M1 does with trucks. The portering work is no longer generally done by Sherpas. Most of the porters are slight men, boys and occasionally girls from lower Nepal, some barefoot, carrying all manner of goods, produce, building materials and fuel in wicker baskets. The weight is taken by a plaited rope across the forehead and looks brutally uncomfortable. But even when handed a rucksack with the latest in strap technology, the straps are ignored and a rope attached.

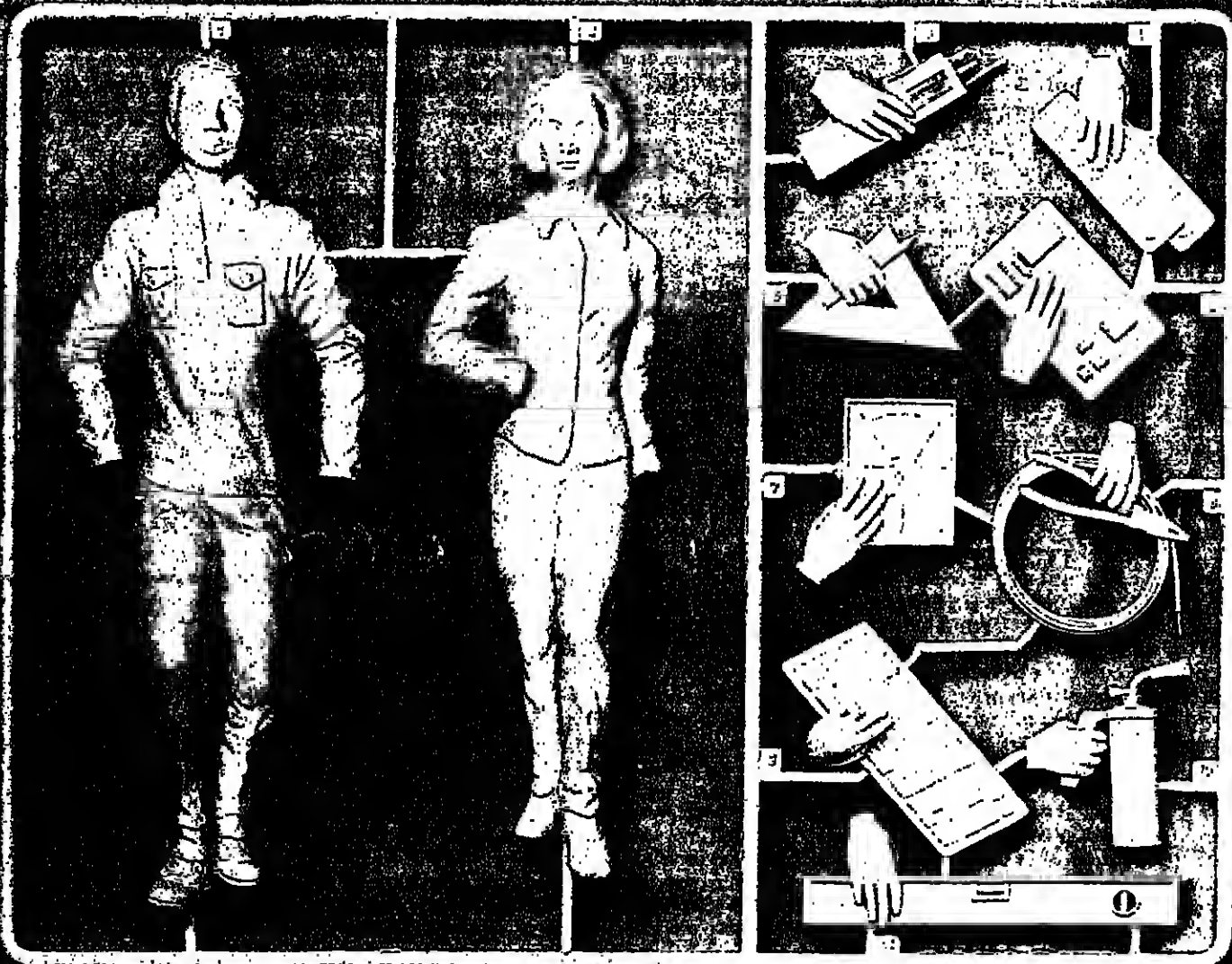
For a Himalayan virgin like myself, there is a pang of conscience at having a lad in flip-flops carrying out just my own heavy-bag of kit not needed on the day walk, but another equally bulky sack. Raju is just 12 years old and probably carrying twice his own bodyweight. He won't come any higher than Base Camp, but even so, a cynic might wonder which one of us is really climbing Everest.

Tomorrow: snow in Namche Bazaar



White man's burden: Sherpa porters, often children aged 12 or less, carry most of the supplies and equipment needed by climbers attempting the Himalayan peaks. 'The Independent's' Stephen Goodwin, top, found himself with a boy in flip-flops carrying his gear. Typically, a porter could be carrying twice his or her bodyweight, suspended by a rope around the forehead.

Main photograph: Tony Wheeler



DAILY POEM

Flightline

By Micheal O'Siadhail

At the core of all the jazz's lavish promise:
Just to keep on playing, to improvise what is.

Saxman Keith Donald told me when the solo moves
It's loose and certain as the promise of loves.

"I'd know," he said, "the true line after one bar,
As if trusting one another we'll play what we are."

Those riffs foregone, adornments you had to eschew,
The siren's sweetness that waits so deep in you,

Between moments endured and moments of the dream,
Singleness of purpose, utter obedience to a theme.

Nothing show-off. Lean flightlines. Grace to soar.
Shaping and shaped by a promise at the music's core.

This poem comes from Micheal O'Siadhail's new volume *Our Double Time* (Bloodaxe, £7.95). Formerly a Dublin-based academic, specialising in the Irish language, he has published two previous collections of poetry.

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NATIONAL TRAINEESHIPS
THE MAKING OF A SCHOOL LEAVER

Gonzalez casts long shadow on Spain's left

By Elizabeth Nash
in Madrid

DESPERATE to dispel the long shadow of the former leader Felipe Gonzalez, Spanish Socialists this weekend launched a campaign for primaries for the first time in their party's 120-year history.

A former Socialist minister, Josep Borrell, has challenged the party leader, Joaquin Almunia, to a duel over who should be Socialist candidate for prime minister, even though national elections are still two years away. Mr Borrell formally threw his hat into the ring - bullfighting metaphors have been stretched to preposterous lengths in recent days - on Saturday at a 20,000-strong rally of the party's mighty Andalusian federation in Mr Gonzalez's Seville heartland.

Mr Borrell muscled his way on to the platform to pledge his loyalty to Mr Almunia but, in

and continues to dominate the Socialist scene. That suede bomber jacket has witnessed too many victories to be written off as a mere relic of past glories.

Spanish Socialists - like Britain's Tories - are still finding their feet in opposition after 14 years from 1982-96 in which Mr Gonzalez was prime minister. They often talk as if they are still in government. Many feel Mr Almunia lacks both charisma and new ideas. He is not the man, they argue, to forge a post-Gonzalez force that can see off the conservative Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar.

Step forward Josep "Pepe" Borrell, a smooth and pushy former public works minister in the last Socialist government. "We must stop pinning for Felipe," he says. Mr Borrell's smug manner has been picked up by the television satire show *Puppet News*, which dubs him "Know-all" and "Mega-pepe". But the entry of a competing contender has spiced up the Socialist leadership process, which used to be a dreary affair of power-broking behind closed doors.

Party members will vote on 24 April, and surveys in yesterday's newspapers suggest Mr Borrell is breathing hard down Mr Almunia's neck. Mr Borrell - a Catalan - seeks to overturn the received wisdom that a Catalan Socialist could not be elected nationwide. He has not, however, sought explicit endorsement from the powerful Catalan Socialist Federation, led by the former defence secretary and devout "Felipista", Narcis Serra.

Even if Mr Borrell loses the nomination, his standing in the party has already been immeasurably strengthened, while that of Mr Almunia, even if he wins, has already been weakened, both by the challenge and the demonstration of support for his challenger.

The policy differences between the two are minimal - mutual buzzwords include employment, sustained development and openness - and are, as is customary in Spanish politics, coded and nuanced to court the party's various power blocks.



Josep Borrell: Ex-minister throws hat in the ring

the next breath, declared that the party's performance in opposition must be improved.

Felipe Gonzalez has been going about recently sporting his tan suede bomber jacket: a sure sign that he, too, is on the campaign trail. Mr Gonzalez quit as leader in a bombshell decision last June and is not standing again. His blessing has fallen upon his decent, competent successor, Joaquin Almunia.

Mr Gonzalez, who was narrowly ditched by the electorate two years ago, remains the favourite of the party faithful. He was star of the Seville rally



Voices of reason: One of the 20,000 people in Paris yesterday protesting against the alliances between the National Front and moderate right parties.

Photograph: AFP

France to reform polls after extreme right's success

PARIS (Reuters) - The French government said yesterday that it plans to introduce laws to tighten up the electoral system after local polls allowed the extremist National Front to gain a foothold in mainstream politics.

But the minister for parliamentary relations, Daniel Vaillant, warned that legislation alone would not halt the Front, branded by its opponents as a throwback to Hitler's Nazis.

Tens of thousands of people demon-

strated in cities throughout France on Saturday to protest against the Front and the regional conservative leaders who this month turned to the anti-foreigner party to keep hold of power in their areas.

The deals came after the Front won a record 15.5 per cent of the vote in 15 March regional elections, giving it the role of kingmaker in a number of councils.

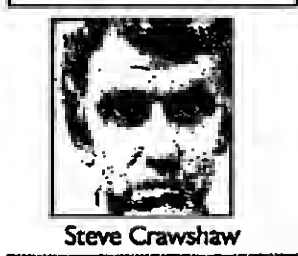
Five regional presidents, all from the

centre-right Union for French Democracy party (UDF), accepted Front backing to keep their majorities - a major breakthrough for the far-right party which had previously been shunned as a political pariah.

A land divided by hatred and schnitzels

WESTERN politicians have often trotted out the idea that the Balkan wars of recent years (based on an original idea by S. Milosevic; all rights have been asserted) were somehow inevitable, because of "buried ethnic hatreds". This analysis, which allowed a hands-off attitude, was mostly garbage. Despite and because of the complex history, ethnic identity was genuinely subsumed in the Yugoslav idea. A Serb friend wistfully remembers summer encounters now lost for ever, when cars from Belgrade and Zagreb tooted at each other on foreign motorways, in a cheerful display of Yugoslav familial recognition. A Croat friend, who grew up near Vukovar, scene of some of the worst horrors of the Serb-Croat war, discovered only from the newspapers that a former classmate was linked with Serb war crimes. Until then, she had

PRISTINA DIARY



Steve Crawshaw

thought of him as a fellow Yugoslav.

Kosovo, on the other hand, that's a different kettle of fish soup. When I first visited here 15 years ago, most of Yugoslavians was still (comparatively) living in ethnically wedded bliss. In Kosovo, however, armed policemen were patrolling the streets of the capital, Pristina. Serbs and Albanians have always led separate lives. Now, they scarcely

talk at all. In just a few days, a foreign journalist probably has more conversations with "the other side" than many Serbs or Albanians in a year. The foreigner is asked to report back from across the divide, because people do not like to ask each other questions directly. For an Albanian or Serb to start a conversation about politics with the Ethnic Other would be most people's last wish.

At the tiny, buzzing Avaloo club in the centre of Pristina, a crowd gathers nightly to drink and dance into the early hours. It's friendly, relaxed - and completely Serb. Albanians have their own equivalent places. One Serb student at the Avaloo described how she likes sometimes to go to an Albanian cafe. But, like the gay Albanian skinhead who can be found in the Avaloo, she is the odd woman out: "My friends think I'm very strange."

As a foreigner, you enjoy all sorts of dubious privileges. One is to travel where nobody else can go. Once you have the right piece of paper, you can travel through checkpoints - passing through roadblocks where Albanians would be turned back, and travelling into territory which the Serb forces are wary of entering. At the checkpoints themselves, there is a strange etiquette. The first plus (and it is a big one): unlike in Bosnia, you do not come across madmen who have been drinking slivovitz plum brandy all afternoon, and who will now wave a gun in your face, steal your money, your computer or your car. The checkpoints are disciplined. But needing is part of the operation. The strange novitani, the foreign journalists, are seen as the terrorists' friend. "Who do you think is guilty?" becomes a challenging remark, not a straightforward question.

If an Albanian translator is marked on the travel permit but is out in the car, the policeman gets tetchy; the suggestion is that you have smuggled an Albanian into bandit country and left him behind. Even your attire can become a subject for aggressive remarks. "Why have you got mud on your shoes?" demanded one policeman, who seemed keen to find a reason to thump us. "You've been with the terrorists, haven't you?"

That policeman, you can be sure, would happily kill Albanians. An increasing number of Albanians would happily kill him. For the moment, the shooting incidents between the two sides are sporadic. But, as in Croatia in summer 1991 and in Bosnia in spring 1992, when the atmosphere was in many respects eerily similar, "for the moment" is the key phrase. It seems likely to be a depressingly short wait.

In a way, it all comes down to schnitzels. One of the best known products of Serbian cuisine is the Karadjordjevi schnitzel, named after the 19th-century Serb national hero. It is like chicken Kiev, but made out of meat, wrapped together with cheese. Very tasty it is, too. In a Pristina restaurant, I found something called a Skenderbeg schnitzel on the menu, and asked the waiter what it was. I probably should have guessed the answer, since Skenderbeg is Albania's national hero: a Skenderbeg schnitzel, it turns out, is a Karadjordjevi schnitzel when served in an Albanian restaurant.

This society is so divided that even the menus lead separate lives - same taste, different loyalty. It would be nice to think there was room in Kosovo for Skenderbeg and Karadjordjevi schnitzels to exist peacefully side by side. Nice, but unreal.

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Arabs set high price for Israel to quit Lebanon

By Robert Fisk
in Beirut

ISRAEL is not leaving southern Lebanon. Despite all the honeyed words from Israeli officials, despite all the reports on CNN, despite the private suspicions of Arab diplomats who should know better - Israel is not going to withdraw a single soldier from its occupation zone 60 miles south of Beirut. Indeed, over the past few days, more Israeli troops have been sent into front-line positions previously held by Israel's proxy "South Lebanon Army".

True, Israel would like to leave. It lost 39 of its occupation troops to southern Lebanon last year and another eight have died in action in 1998; its Lebanese militia ally has lost a further 29 men in the same 15 months. Almost equally serious is the fall in casualties among Israel's Hizbollah enemies. While the guerrillas were losing as many as 100 men for every Israeli killed 10 years ago, they are now taking casualties on an almost one-to-one basis. Just 82 Hizbollah men have died in the past 15 months, only six more than Israel and its militia. The outcry from the mothers of Israeli soldiers serving in Lebanon grows.

Listening to Israeli politicians these past two weeks, the world might be forgiven for believing the mothers will get their way. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister - who is not interested in abiding by UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 (calling for total Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territory) - suddenly announced he wanted to abide by Security Council resolution 425, which calls for a total and unconditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon. The Israeli cabinet, we are told, has "agreed" a withdrawal.

But Israel wants conditions at-

tached. It wants a promise that the Lebanese army will safeguard the border and prevent cross-border attacks. And it wants the Hizbollah disarmed before a withdrawal. The first desire is reasonable enough. But the second will never be agreed by the Arabs, for two reasons. Firstly, Syria wants Israel to withdraw from the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights, and Syria's support for the Hizbollah is the only pressure it can bring upon the Israelis to hand back Golan as well as southern Lebanon. Secondly - in the words of a former Lebanese diplomat - Israel, in the eyes of the Arabs, has run out of credit. "Oslo was a big test for us and for the Israelis," he said. "Israel signed the Oslo agree-

'We could disarm Hizbollah and the Israelis might find a reason to stay in Lebanon'

ment. But despite its signature, it is still controlling much of the West Bank and is building even more Jewish settlements on Arab land. What is to stop them doing the same thing if we agreed to their conditions for withdrawal from Lebanon?"

"We could disarm the Hizbollah, which is the only force pushing them to leave, and then the Israelis might find a reason to stay. And we could do nothing about it. We learned a lot from Oslo and we are not going to make the same mistake again. These deals need international guarantees, not just peace accords that can then be broken."

In Cairo, the Arab League

rejected Mr Netanyahu's proposal for a withdrawal. Fariz Bouez, the Lebanese foreign minister, told delegates that if Israel wanted to abide by Resolution 425 - passed in 1978 after Israel's first invasion of Lebanon - then "it should just pack up and get out". In reality, numerous Hizbollah officials have made it clear the guerrillas would not pursue the Israelis over the border. Hizbollah has already set up a political organisation within Lebanon's own internal political structure to secure a future once the war is over. An Iranian government spokesman, the culture minister Atallah Mahejarani, has himself said if Israel leaves Lebanon, there would be "no need to continue its resistance activities". Since Iran arms the Hizbollah - if less generously than America arms Israel - this was a significant remark.

The ironies of the situation, however, are all too clear. Whereas 20 years ago, the Lebanese demanded an Israeli withdrawal and the Israelis refused, now the Israelis are demanding a withdrawal and the Lebanese are turning them down. This has provided good propaganda for the Israelis. Here they are, vainly demanding to end their own occupation while the world accuses them of reneging on the "peace process". In truth, southern Lebanon is the only area where the Israelis are bleeding - literally - to hang onto occupied land; and the Arabs are not going to oblige them by letting them go.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon have been in southern Lebanon for 20 years and have signally failed to complete their mission of moving up to the Israeli frontier and securing the sovereign territory of Lebanon for the Beirut government. UN forces are a mile further from the Israeli border than they were two decades ago.

Saddam's hat trick: Iraq's leader makes rare public appearances to rally support



BAGHDAD (Reuters) - President Saddam Hussein greeting villagers at al-Budoon, 110 miles from Baghdad, where he was regaling them with tales from his youth. Making a rare public

appearance at the weekend, he also visited two central Iraqi villages through which he fled 39 years ago after failing in an assassination attempt on President Abdul-Karim

Qassem. State television showed President Saddam firing celebratory rifle shots in the air at one village while locals danced and chanted support; he then prayed for Iraq's "hero-

ic endurance to be rewarded with victory", the station said. At the same time, UN inspectors scouring his palace at Tikrit for weapons.

Oldest synagogue excavated at Jericho

JERICHO (Reuters) - The world's oldest known synagogue has been excavated near the biblical town of Jericho, an Israeli archaeologist said yesterday.

The synagogue, within the complex of a Hasmonean palace, was built between 75 and 50 BC during the reign of Queen Salome or one of her sons and was destroyed by an earthquake in 31 BC, said Professor Ehud Netzer, of Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

At the site, archaeologists discovered the first evidence supporting ancient accounts that ceremonial meals, as well as

prayers, were held in synagogues. "It was a bit like a community centre" said Professor Netzer, who is supervising the dig. "We know the Bible was read three times a week, but there was also a room attached to the synagogue where religious meals were held."

Professor Netzer first uncovered the palace 25 years ago. Excavations continued until 1987 and were resumed early this year. Professor Netzer said the synagogue was in an Israel-controlled area of the West Bank, just outside Palestinian-ruled Jericho.

Peace process is near collapse, warns Albright

By Patrick Cockburn
in Jerusalem

THE American special envoy, Dennis Ross, met with Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, last night to discuss the extent of Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank as Washington warned that the peace process was on the verge of collapse.

Israel has insisted that the withdrawal will comprise no more than 9 per cent of the West Bank's territory while the US wants 13.1 per cent. Even this is well short of the 30 per

cent that the Palestinians expected under the terms of the Oslo agreement.

Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State, earlier told Jewish leaders in America that the peace process was on the verge of collapse and that the US was considering ending its efforts. However, an ultimatum would be given to Israel.

The US wants its 13.1 per cent withdrawal to take place linked to Palestinian guarantees over security. Mr Netanyahu has suggested a lower figure but says the land handed over would be contiguous to existing Pales-

tinian enclaves on the West Bank.

The US has yet to go public with its initiative and Mr Netanyahu has asked it not to. Despite opposition from the extreme end of his right-wing coalition to giving back any of the land Israel conquered in 1967 to the Palestinians, the prime minister is in a strong position domestically and could deliver an agreement. The Palestinians would also accept a deal because they feel they have little alternative and want to improve their standing in Washington.

the university for industry

Monday 20 April 1998

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Rosie Boycott,

Editor, The Independent and The Independent on Sunday

David Brown,

Chairman, Motorola Ltd and Chair, UFI Design and Implementation Advisory Group

Josh Hillman,

Institute for Public Policy Research

Simon Sperry,

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Yeltsin's sacked PM enters race for the Kremlin

By Phil Reeves
in Moscow

BORIS YELTSIN yesterday carefully declined to give unqualified backing to Viktor Chernomyrdin as his successor, reviving the possibility that - wildly ambitious though this may seem - he still harbours ambitions of remaining in the Kremlin into the 21st century.

The president held back from publicly endorsing his former prime minister, who this weekend delivered Moscow's second political shock within a week by declaring that he intends to run for the presidency in 2000.

Although Mr Chernomyrdin, dismissed by Mr Yeltsin last Monday, claimed he had his former boss's blessing to enter the race, Kremlin aides were working hard behind the scenes to emphasise that Mr Yeltsin had yet to choose his favoured candidate. Mr Yeltsin had "not determined his position" on the ex-premier's decision to run, a senior source told the Interfax news agency. Nor, the source said, had the 67-year-old president made his mind up about a third term.

A third term would seem improbable, given Mr Yeltsin's erratic health and behaviour, and his advancing years. But he is famously unpredictable, and enjoys applying egg to the faces of his doctors and critics. He also cares about his place in history as the man who oversaw the birth (albeit still incomplete) of a new Russia from the ashes of the Soviet Union. Health allowing, if he and his inner circle - some of whom have fortunes at stake - conclude that no other acceptable

candidate has a chance of victory, he may yet seek to stay on.

Mr Chernomyrdin's declaration came as a surprise because, with more than two years to go, it is remarkably early in the game. The president's cool response is almost certainly also because he wants to see how his former colleague fares before committing himself.

Conventional wisdom has it that the burly former prime minister has about as much chance of victory as Mr Yeltsin has of winning Wimbledon. He is deemed to have the charisma of a tea-towel - and one soiled, to boot, by five years' service in an unpopular government.

But Russian politics has little to do with conventionality. What matters far more than the former prime minister's dreary persona is the support of the small élite who control much of the media, and whose private fortunes helped propel an unpopular Mr Yeltsin back into office in 1996.

Yesterday one of the leading king-makers, Boris Berezovsky, an oil and media tycoon, welcomed Mr Chernomyrdin's move, saying he viewed it "absolutely positively". The Kremlin's backing, even if covert, can help bamboozle the more pliable regions into lining up behind a candidate.

But equally important is the strength of the field. One likely combatant is the mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov. Like Mr Chernomyrdin, who has the backing of the mighty energy lobby, the mayor has plenty of money, powerful connections, and a strong foothold in the media. Unlike the ex-prime minister, he is a sparkling performer, no de-

mocrat, but with a convincing popular touch. To the consternation of some in the West, his market credentials are decidedly shaky. If he decides to run, it will deepen the risk of splitting the anti-Communist vote - a prospect that will be preoccupying the king-makers. What fabulous price could Mr Luzhkov now ask in order to stay out?

Mr Chernomyrdin's 35-year-old replacement, Sergei Kiriyenko, is facing a more pressing issue. The Communists, who dominate the State Duma (lower house), intend to oppose confirming him in his post. A long bartering process between parliament and the Kremlin is about to begin.



Marque of respect: Vintage Porsches parked on the esplanade of the Cinquecentaire Arch in Brussels during the first rally of the year for Belgian owners. The event was arranged before the death on Friday of Ferdinand Porsche, founder of the world famous car company. Photograph: AP

Ugandans make palace fit for king

KAMPALA (AP) — Slashing trees, burning grass, and hauling debris, some 40,000 Ugandan royalists are working to prepare the hilltop palace for the return of the king of Buganda.

The palace at Lubiri, just west of Kampala, was once the pride of Buganda with its high walls, beautiful gardens and lake.

Before Ronald Muwenda Mutebi, a British-trained lawyer who is the king or "Kabaka" of Uganda's largest tribe, can repossess the palace - which had been turned into a barracks - it needs a thorough scrubbing.

"I came here to join the others in cleaning up the palace," Rovinsa Namusoke, 54, said. "It

looks like a cave. We must clean it for our lord."

Military experts have sealed off suspected minefields around the palace for clearing but royalists complain they are short of money to restore glory to the palace. By tradition, the king is forbidden to enter the palace until he has been anointed by witch doctors, healers and soothsayers.

King Mutebi generally spends his time raising money to help street children and advising on planting trees. But after 1993, when President Yoweri Museveni restored monarchies that had been abolished in the Sixties, Mutebi found himself in the role of the Kabaka.

Hidden eyes keep domestic life on the straight and narrow

By Stephen Vines
in Hong Kong

TROUBLE with the servants? Worried they are eating you out of house and home, stealing and idling? A Hong Kong company called Welpro Security may have the answer.

It has developed a hi-tech surveillance system called "Secure Look" which monitors homes with tiny cameras embedded in ceilings, furniture and anywhere else. The cameras record the comings and goings of domestic servants on video tapes, but really anxious employers can access this material by computer while they are out of the house through a telephone-computer linked system.

Servants are a big issue in Hong Kong. A small army of more than 100,000 imported domestic workers beaver away in the former colony's households. Most come from the Philippines and work on short-term contracts.

The day of the Chinese family retainers, known as "amahs", has passed away, forcing middle class families to bring unknown foreigners

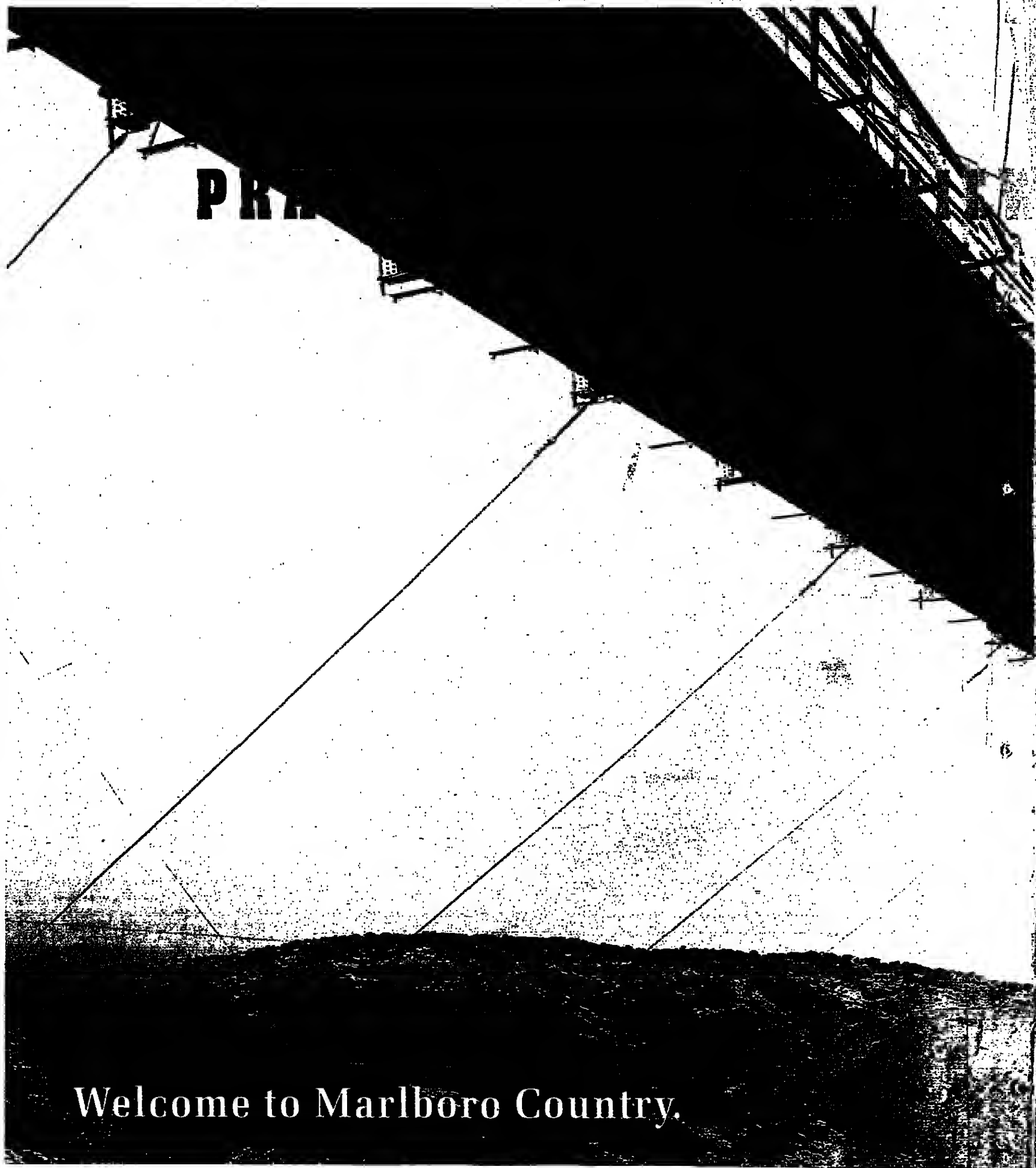
into their homes. Even families of fairly modest means often find it worthwhile to employ a full-time domestic worker for about £300 per month, plus board and lodging. Their presence explains why so many Hong Kong women have been free to join the labour force.

But there is much mistrust between employers and their staff.

Hong Kong even has an association dedicated to backing the rights of employers and campaigning for the minimum statutory wage to be kept down and even easier terms for dismissal and deportation.

The numbers of domestic workers coming into Hong Kong reached an all time high last year when 45,327 employment visas were issued. The recent recession has caused some lay offs.

The only problem with the new surveillance system is that its use is almost certainly a breach of Hong Kong's privacy laws. And these laws are about to be beefed up, which would make covert filming of people in their homes a criminal offence.



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Rock fanfare for Versace

NEW YORK (AP) — With its requisite celebrity-studded audience and blaring rock music, the house of Versace unveiled its latest collection at the weekend as New York's fashion week began with a flourish.

It was the first New York showing of the line since the principal designer Gianni Versace was shot dead last July.

The invitation-only crowd of 700 included film director Woody Allen and his wife, Soon-Yi Previn, actress Elizabeth Hurley, and singers Sheryl Crow and K.D. Lang. The clothes on show were designed by Versace's sister, Donatella.

The men's line was made primarily of black fabrics, from high-buttoned jackets to leather pants. For the women, there were silver flapper dresses and leggings draped with narrow-cut skirts.



Show time: Woody Allen tries to block out the music at the Versace fashion show, flanked by his wife Soon-Yi Previn and Santo Versace. Photograph: AP

Race row threatens Springbok survival

By Mary Braid
in Cape Town

THE NEW South Africa's patience with the country's rugby bosses has snapped. The country's National Sports Council has given the South African Rugby Football Union (Safu) executive — and its chief, Louis Luyt — 14 days to resign or face a ban on international matches and a loss of the famous Springbok emblem.

Bitterness between rugby officials and Nelson Mandela's government has been building for months, but Mr Mandela's humiliation two weeks ago by Mr Luyt was the final straw.

Contesting the government's right to launch an inquiry into mismanagement and racism, Mr Luyt asked a Pretoria High Court judge to summon President Mandela for cross-examination on how he reached his decision.

Bishop Desmond Tutu said he was so angry at the indignities rugby's bosses had heaped on President Mandela by forcing him into court that although he was an avid rugby fan, he may stop watching the game.

In court, President Mandela contested Safu's claim that as a private organisation it should be free from political interference. He said he had staked his political future on promoting "the game of the enemy" after he was released from his 27-year incarceration. He said rugby, which is afforded quasi-religious status by Afrikaners — was a legitimate government concern.

The current bitterness is light years away from the early days of Mr Mandela's presidency when it was thought rugby might play a key part in the nation's healing process by throwing off its racist reputation.

At the weekend, after a heated meeting in Pretoria, the Sports Council gave its resignation ultimatum. It wants to appoint an interim committee to run rugby's affairs. Safu was quick to reject the council's demands, and it now remains to

be seen if the council will now go ahead with its threat to cancel all tours to South Africa by international rugby sides, suspend Safu's membership of the council and withdrawn permission to use the Springbok emblem.

The Sports Council claims it holds the rights to the emblem. After Mr Mandela's government came to power in 1994, all other sporting bodies traded the Springbok — for most South Africans a symbol of the apartheid days — for the protea, the national flower. It was Mr Mandela who resisted calls for the adoption of a new emblem for rugby, despite the fact that the Springbok insignia was consid-



Badge of oppression — the Springbok emblem

ered so racially inflammatory. The council's threats could return South Africa rugby to the international isolation it suffered during apartheid.

The Sports Council has also considered a call to freeze all Safu's assets and the launch of a mass action campaign, backed by unions and churches, to force rugby to toe the line. These drastic steps have been not been put into effect immediately only because some council members said they feared such action could destroy the sport entirely.

"We don't want to kill rugby," said sports council president Muleki George. "If we withdraw the Springbok emblem now and boycott international tours, the game will not survive".

Peruvian plane crash kills 15

A Peruvian air force plane evacuating people stranded by floods crashed into a shantytown in the northern city of Piura yesterday. Local media said at least 15 people were killed. The director of a local hospital said 28 people had been rescued. The Russian-made plane was believed to be carrying at least 40 people. — AP, Lima

Malaysia steps up expulsions

Malaysia says it will speed up efforts to repatriate more than 8,000 illegal immigrants to Indonesia, following clashes in local detention camps. Last week riots broke out at three of the country's detention camps. The worst was at Semenyih, south of the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. Official reports said eight Indonesian illegal immigrants and one Malaysian police officer were killed. — AP, Kuala Lumpur

Royal start to Hajj

A leading member of the Saudi ruling family led the ritual washing of the Kaaba, the ancient stone structure in Mecca that is sacred to Muslims, the official Saudi Press Agency reported. Prince Majed, Governor of Mecca, who is a brother of King Fahd, performed the ceremony on behalf of the Saudi monarch. The Kaaba — a cube-shaped structure attributed to the Prophet Abraham — is washed twice a year with perfumed water. The ritual is usually carried out by King Fahd, but he has not been well since suffering a stroke in November 1995. — AP, Jiddah

El Niño kills sea lions

Thousands of starving sea lions have been washed ashore to die on beaches in Peru, because El Niño has driven away the fish they eat. Of the 180,000 sea lions that lived on Peru's Pacific coast before El Niño arrived late last year, 30,000 remain, say biologists. "Most of the dead sea lions we have found are adult females. This means that for this El Niño the probability of the population recovering rapidly is much lower," she said. — AP, San Juan

Chinese bone up on writing

Chinese archaeologists have dug up 3,500-year-old sheep bones bearing the oldest known examples of Chinese writing, the official Xinhua news agency reported yesterday. Eight inscriptions were carved crudely and deeply into two bones found in a pit at a sacrificial site in China's eastern Shandong province. Xinhua said. Experts recognised only two of the primitive characters — one meaning "six" and the other "divination". The earliest bone inscriptions previously found — in central Henan province — dated back 3,200 years to the late Shang Dynasty, Xinhua said. — Reuters, Peking

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Following in Eve's footsteps

Juliet Sanders on the battle to preserve the world's oldest footprints, as they come under increasing threat from curious tourists

IN THE West Coast National Park in South Africa, about 100km north of Cape Town, are three footprints. At a glance, they look quite ordinary in size and shape, like those made by any modern woman walking through soft sand. The difference is that these are embedded – fossilised – in the rock. In fact, they were made 117,000 years ago and are the oldest human footprints ever discovered.

They were found in 1995, by geologist David Roberts. But he held off announcing the discovery, despite its momentous importance, until last year. Even then it was too soon. Now scientists are worried about how many more years these footprints will last, for while they have survived everything nature has thrown at them, tourist interest is literally wiping them away.

The three prints are believed to have been made by a woman, 5ft 3in (1.6m) tall, strolling barefoot in wet sand after a rainstorm. The big toe, ball, arch and heel of the foot are well-defined, making the footprints – which were eventually fossilised – an important clue to understanding when anatomically modern humans emerged.

Roberts found the footprints in September 1995 after uncovering an ancient stone core, the flakes of which were used by early man for scouring and other tasks. "On a hunch" he went looking for traces of its maker. "I scrambled up and down these rock faces for hours finding absolutely nothing," he said on announcing the discovery last year. "Then I looked down and found that footprint there. The chances of finding something like this are a million to one."

Once the prints were made, they were covered very quickly with windblown sand on a slope that eventually turned to sandstone after being buried under pressure for tens of thousands of years. "They had to be buried for a very long time to turn to rock," said Roberts. Set on a pristine lagoon beach, the sandstone rock in which the footprints are embedded is so fragile that it crumbles quite easily. Even running one's hand over the surface causes fine grains of sand to come away.

What is so exciting about the footprints? Theory suggests that all human life – well before the emergence of *Homo sapiens* – is descended from one common female

ancestor, known as "genetic Eve". We do not know whether the prints are hers (the chances of that are incalculably small). But experts say they were made at the right time and place to fit her profile.

"What we do know from other sites in South Africa is that there were anatomically modern humans living here. It's like putting together the pieces of a puzzle," says Janette Deacon, an archaeologist at South Africa's National Monuments Council.

Ms Deacon has noticed growing interest in the site from people who want to share something – anything – with this woman from so long ago. "There's been no tailing off of interest in the site. That's exciting, because it's engendering in people a sense of history."

But the public's fascination with their cultural heritage has become a threat to the footprint trail. In fact, it has ruled out scientists' hopes of preserving them in situ. The effects of the visiting hordes who have heaped a path to see this older trail are clearly visible. There is already graffiti dotting the rocks around the footprints. People visiting the site have been spotted clambering on to the brittle dune rock to stand inside the footprints – prompting fears that if left unchecked, irreparable damage will result.

Conservationists want to keep those people away. But their case is not helped by the fact that the footprints are on a popular beach in a picturesque national park where last Christmas the visitors were arriving in about 200 cars a day. Large numbers are expected this Easter, so no chances are being taken. Guards are already on site to patrol the area and prevent further damage. A transparent Perspex screen will soon also be suspended over the footprints to prevent people putting their feet in them.

The weather is another foe, and one that cannot be controlled. The rock has already slipped slightly from its original position through a combination of wind and wave action, according to Craig Morkel of Corporate Image, one of the organisations involved in the talks about the future of the footprints. "In the long term, the wind and wave action below will undercut that rock and it will slide into the water,"



In the beginning: Was 'genetic' Eve responsible for the marks? Lucas Granach's Adam and Eve (above)

Photograph: Reuters

Morkel adds. "It is sad for all of us, but removal has been reluctantly accepted. We understand and accept it now."

Ms Deacon agrees that any damage could not be repaired. "There is no way the footprints are going to remain undamaged there," she says. "The rock beneath the surface is very soft and fragile, and if you don't look after it you could end up with just a pile of sand."

Scientists, conservationists and others interested in preserving the footprints have handed together and decided they must be moved temporarily to the South African Museum in Cape Town – if it can be done safely. A host of special-

ists have been consulted over the best way to move the rock prints, including Briton Keith Taylor, an expert in stone conservation, who has

the West Coast National Park have bowed to necessity. "Unfortunately, we have to go for second prize at this stage," says the park's warden,

Visitors have been spotted clambering on to the brittle dune rock to stand inside the footprints, prompting fears about damage

agreed to inspect the site during a visit in the country in May. Meanwhile, the authorities at

Otto von Kaspark. As the millennium approaches, he anticipates continuing interest in the

footprint trail. "There is a need by modern man to find his roots and his origins. This could be a tremendous draw."

The park plans to build a visitors' site that will measure up to international standards, and then it will attempt to claim back the footprints. "We will try to soften the blow by putting a very good replica in its place and, hopefully, at some time stage we will be able to return the original," says Mr von Kaspark.

But this still underlines the troubling question: how do we look after the interests of the past without cutting it off from the present?

THEORETICALLY...

Ever get the feeling you're being watched? The one-metre-resolution space imagery already used by high-specification military satellites is now available to us all. Space Imaging, of Colorado, is launching a commercial high-resolution satellite in the Athena II rocket. Once the IKONOS 1 satellite is in place, customers will be able to order high-resolution pictures of anywhere in the world. Meanwhile, you can order similar images from a company closer to home. GeoInformation International has digital aerial maps of more than 75 cities around the world, available to customers on CD-Rom. The whole of central London is stored in 7GB of data, at a cost of £5,000.

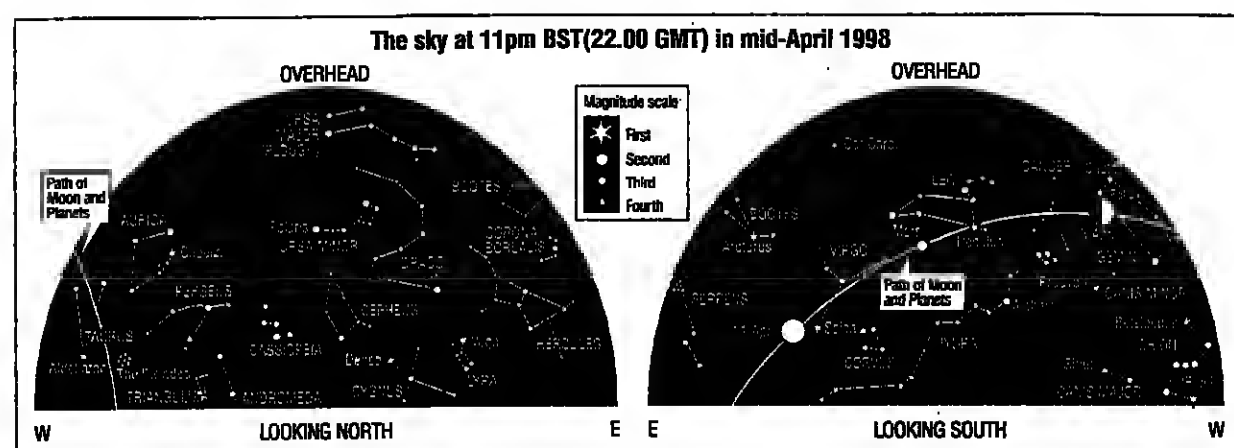
Several frog species have become extinct recently and others are showing alarming rates of deformity. No single cause has been identified, but the first field experiment under natural conditions have confirmed that ambient levels of ultraviolet-B (UV-B) radiation from the sun can cause high rates of amphibian mortality and deformity. According to the proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Joseph N. Kiesecker compared the embryos of long-toed salamanders, which were shielded from UV-B radiation by mylar filters, with unshielded embryos. He found that 95 per cent of the shielded embryos hatched, compared with only 14.5 per cent of the unshielded embryos. Of the surviving salamanders, 0.5 per cent of those shielded were deformed, compared with 91.9 per cent of those unshielded. Higher levels of an enzyme called photolyase may protect some species.

Earthquakes along the San Andreas fault, north-east of Los Angeles, have occurred more regularly than previously thought and the next big one could come sooner than supposed, says geologist Mark T. Brandon. Using his knowledge of lichens to pinpoint the dates of previously unknown ancient earthquakes, a new method called "lichenometry", he found signs of earthquakes larger than magnitude 7, which generated numerous rock avalanches as far as 400km from the epicentre. Soon after the quakes, spongy lichens began to colonise the fresh rock surfaces. Because of their predictable growth rate, lichens make it possible to estimate within 10 and 20 years when an earthquake occurred in the past thousand years. The method was used to identify a major unknown quake near Los Angeles in 1690 and several earthquakes in New Zealand over the past 700 years.

The number of people infected with internal parasites such as tapeworms is soaring – and tourism is being blamed. With more people travelling to Eastern Europe, an area of high infection, the frequency with which people are affected is rising fast. Eating undercooked beef, pork or fish is the main way you can acquire the beastie, which can grow up to 30ft long. Eggs develop into larvae and live in the small intestine. Although an infected person can suffer weight loss and stomach pains, there may be no symptoms. The only sign of infection may be individual white segments of tapeworm emerging from your rectum – dead or alive. If it is not treated, the patient may develop cysticercosis – a disease in which the tapeworm larvae invade the brain, causing serious mental disturbance.

Scientists from Leicester University are using techniques for studying stars and distant galaxies in the battle against cancer. Detectors normally used to record X-ray emission from space are now being developed for the analysis of human tissue. Scientists in the department of physics and astronomy believe the new detector could make an impact in the investigation of cancer-treating drugs, such as tamoxifen, commonly given as a treatment to women with breast cancer.

THE STARS THIS MONTH



WHILE YOU were sleeping last night, a radio dish 140ft (42m) in diameter, set in the wilds of West Virginia, was busy scanning the sky for signs of alien life. Panning from selected star to selected star, the telescope lingered on each one for just a few minutes – long enough to listen for any tell-tale artificial radio signals emanating from the star's circling planets.

This privately funded search, called Project Phoenix, has been going on for nearly five years. It arose out of the ashes of a NASA-funded project, axed by the US Congress after only one year in 1993 because, as one senator put it, "not one Martian has said 'take me to your leader'". An editorial in the *Boston Globe* wryly commented: "This only goes to prove that there is no intelligent life in Washington."

Many astronomers are certain there is intelligent life out there. The Sun is an ordinary star with planets and other stars have planets, too. There are 200bn stars in our galaxy alone, and the chemical elements that make up life are among the most common in the Universe.

For 40 years, a dedicated band of astronomers has been on the trail of ET. Working from the premise that all technologically driven civilisations will go through a phase of communicating by radio waves – they are fast, cheap and penetrating – the researchers have been building receivers of increasing complexity to pin down civilisations. Soon, the SETI researchers hope to pick up a signal. The effects will send shockwaves around our planet. Knowing we are not alone in space will put a different perspective on everything. We must also decide whether

to reply – an act some believe would be extreme stupidity. Anthropologist Jared Diamond begs radio astronomers to send a reply to switch off their transmitters. He fears the aliens will track us down and do, in his words "what every superior civilisation has done to lesser civilisations throughout history", subjugate and eventually exterminate them.

But the SETI researchers believe that a dialogue with a more advanced race could be enormously beneficial to us. But who should reply on behalf of all humankind? And what should the message say? Time is running out for SETI. Increasing radio interference from our electronic society is drowning out the faint murmurings crossing light years of space. Ultimately, the SETI astronomers are asking to

be allocated a crater on the far side of the Moon.

What if we never pick up a signal? Then we might have to face the fact that we are alone. Then we would be responsible not just for one small planet – but for an entire Universe.

The night sky in April
It's a pretty poor month for planets. None are visible in the evening sky; in the early morning you'll catch brilliant Venus low in the twilight glow, rising little more than an hour before the Sun. Lower still is the second brightest planet, Jupiter. The two planets are steadily converging, passing close to one another on the morning of 23 April, when they form a spectacular trio with the thin crescent moon. April diary (all times 24-hour, BST)
3rd: 219 Moon at First Quarter
11th: 2324 Full Moon
19th: 2053 Moon at Last Quarter
22nd: 1500 (approx) Maximum of Lyrids meteor shower – 10 meteors/hr
26th: 1241 New Moon

Heather Couper and Nigel Henbest

TELL ME ABOUT ... Catastrophism

BEFORE 1830, everyone was a catastrophist. The theory that most of the features in the Earth were produced by sudden, short-lived, worldwide events, tied in perfectly with the Christian fundamentalism that dominated thinking in the West.

Christians knew that the Earth had a turbulent history, including a planet-wide flood. Awkwardnesses, such as dinosaur fossils and seashells on lofty mountain peaks could be neatly explained away by reference to divine intervention in the geological record.

Then the Scottish geologist Charles Lyell came up with a radical theory, expounded in *The Principles of Geology*, published in 1830. Lyell said that the Earth's crust had been subjected not to a series of divine catastrophes, but instead to a slow and unending process of change and renewal.

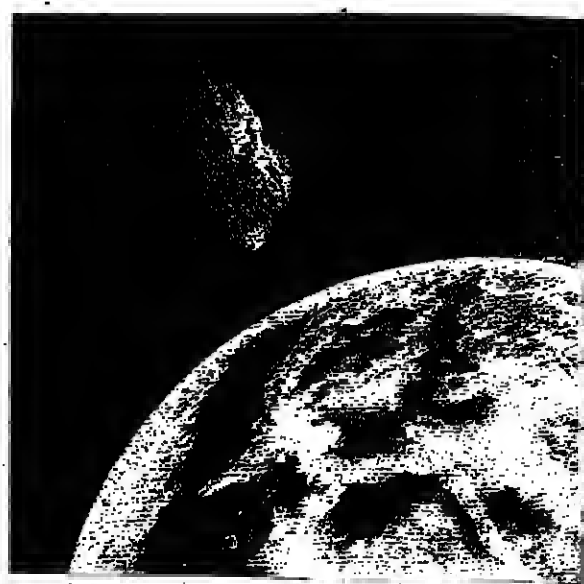
The rivers wear the mountains away to dust. This dust is compacted into sediments, which eventually sink into the mantle, melt, and are thrust up again as new mountains. Then the whole process begins again: "We find no vestige of a

beginning, no prospect of an end," he wrote.

This idea – which came to be known as Uniformitarianism – dominated geology for 150 years. It seemed to tie in perfectly with Darwin's ideas of evolution by natural selection, which had no reliance on divine intervention. By the 1970s, Catastrophism, with its fundamentalist overtones, was pronounced as dead and buried as a slah of Jurassic limestone.

But there was a problem. At the end of the Cretaceous, some 65m years ago, the dinosaurs, the great marine reptiles, the flying pterosaurs and many other species all vanished. Apparently in the space of a few centuries or less. Other mass extinctions had happened before in Earth's history. How could these sudden and dramatic events be explained in terms of Lyell's timeless concept of gradual change?

In 1980, father-and-son geologist team Walter and Luis Alvarez claimed that the end of the Cretaceous was marked by a thin clay layer rich in iridium. This layer was found in places as far apart as Denmark and New Zealand, implying a planet-wide origin.



Doomsday: coming to a planet near you

The two geologists proposed that the Cretaceous extinctions had been caused by the impact of a six-mile-wide asteroid, which scattered iridium-rich dust throughout the atmosphere. Then in 1990, a 180km-wide impact crater was discovered in Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. The crater was of the right age and the right size to fit in with the Alvarez hypothesis. After its death some 160 years before, Catastrophism was reborn as Neo-Catastrophism.

shorn of its religious connotations. Many geologists now believe that Earth's history – including the history of life – has been profoundly influenced by cosmic impacts. We have no idea when the next impact will occur – earlier this month scientists thought for a few hours that an asteroid was on its way in just 30 years' time – but if something the size of the dinosaur-killer hits us, then arguing about geology will be the least of our worries. Michael Holton

Dr. J. L. ...

Louise Jury talks to author Judi James as we begin her guide to the perils of passion in the workplace

Queen of the jungle



Judi James: You should keep your animal instincts under control if you want to have a successful career, she says

Photograph: Andrew Buurman



SEX AT WORK

JUDI JAMES says don't do it. Sex in the office is a big, big mistake. Anyone on the fast track to success must know that passion and promotion don't mix. "If you are truly career-minded and that is your sole goal, it is better to leave it out," she says. "A good career needs planning, and it will become unstable if sex gets in the way. You lose a certain amount of control."

But for the rest of us, Judi is more realistic. She acknowledges that thousands may be tempted at some point by Brian or Brenda in accounts, so she simply offers a few words of advice. In her new book, *Sex at Work, A Survival Guide*, Judi says think twice, count to 10, and try to look several steps ahead. Oh yes, and avoid the temptation to do anything incriminating on the photocopier.

"Too many people say, 'I wish I had thought about it beforehand'," she says. It's all very well claiming you'll be adults about it. But nobody is an adult in relationships, we're all childish. One of the greatest lies of our time is, 'If we break up, it won't affect our working relationship'."

Judi advocates cold rationality before making a move. "Fancying someone you

work with is not a criminal offence – neither is asking them out." But, she warns, consider the consequences first. "Yes, I know you're only going to ask him/her down the pub, not down the aisle, but it's always best to study every angle of a situation before taking the plunge."

Her advice on sex in the office comes not from experience of photocopyers and coffee machines. She has never worked in an office in her life, although she suffered from serious sexual harassment – which was then par for the course – when she worked as a model in the Seventies. "It was that type of era. We got used to fighting men off at photographic sessions, and we didn't really realise it wasn't acceptable," she says.

But for the last 15 years, five days a week, she has been running training courses for business and industry on public image and on office behaviour. In between writing racy non-fiction novels, she has written books including *Body Talk – The Skills of Positive Image* and *The Office Jungle*. And the need for guidance is such that it is the Industrial Society, a training and advisory organisation which campaigns to improve life at work, which is publishing the new guide.

With a touch of humour, *Sex at Work* addresses sex on two fronts – the office relationship, illicit or otherwise, and the more serious question of sexual harassment. In the words of the blurb, it is a "timely guide for all those who need to negotiate the minefield between gentle flirtation and blatant sexual harassment". Judi presents rules for surviving the office party, outlines the perils of getting caught in a compromising position on the security camera and clues on spotting a colleague porn surfing on the Internet.

"Probably up until about five years ago,

I wouldn't have wanted to touch such a book with a broom pole," Judi says. "Industry went through a terribly politically correct era when even looking at somebody's ankles was a hanging offence. You couldn't have written anything with any humour attached. But now people have got their sense of humour back. A lot of company policies and general culture are more relaxed."

Yet the serious side of the office is manifest in the newspaper headlines. Cases of sexual harassment continue to end up at industrial tribunals and the failed office affair still has the capacity to cause frosty

sired last October may become a nightmare by March. "It's horribly, horribly, terribly serious when it goes wrong," she says. "People need to work as a team in offices and partnerships upset the balance anyway. Even if you take sex out of the situation, people are bad at working together."

Some careers still discourage relationships, either in or outside the office, Judi says. The City and the law are, in general, less open-minded than media companies. For instance, Yet employers who ignore the possibility of passion are fooling themselves. Work is still where many people first set eyes on their future partner. It is estimated that

A lot of it comes down to common sense, she says, but people should be made aware when they are causing offence. And, increasingly, men are as likely to be the victims as women – even though they do not always admit it. "Guys say, 'I should be so lucky,' but they're envisaging a beautiful female boss who asks them to strip off," Judi says. "A lot of situations that were described to me by men were stories that women would perceive as sexual harassment."

For a woman with some stern advice, Judi James is remarkably warm and open. She has a broad smile and a ready laugh. With long blonde hair and long slim legs, she is probably accustomed to a certain amount of attention.

In essence, she claims she doesn't want to stop people having fun and seems relieved that the office affair is still alive and kicking. She is keen to strike a balance. "Some things are more important than work," she says. Ambition regardless, she suspects she would have fallen foul of her own advice given half an opportunity. "If I'd ever worked in an office, I would have been there, done that, bought the T-shirt. I'm probably one of the least sensible people I know."

But you only have to look at a few high-profile cases to realise the wisdom of ensuring your sexual signals are not misread. Judi muses on the allegations besieging US President. "I'd love to know whether Bill Clinton would be in this position now if somebody had said something to him," she says. "Maybe I should send him a copy of the book."

Sex at Work: A Survival Guide by Judi James is available in bookshops from 3 April, price £8.99, or call 0121 410 3040. Tomorrow: bosom-brushing, thigh patting, huggy greetings: your guide to what is and what isn't harassment.

'People need to work as a team in offices – and partnerships upset the balance. Even if you take sex out of the situation, people are bad at working together'



relations. "It's like that advert," Judi says, having spoken to hundreds of workers about harassment in the course of her research. "I've never done it, but I know a man who does."

Judi has found some male managers terrified to be left alone in their office with a woman member of staff for fear of a sexual harassment claim. "If they've got a good career with a marriage and wife and family, they fear they could lose everything," she says.

And even a relationship that was de-

up in half of couples meet at the office. Judi simply wants to stop the mistakes.

On the question of sexual harassment, however, she takes a more serious line. Fifteen per cent of men and 54 per cent of working women admit to having experienced sexual harassment. This is where she hopes employers, as well as employees will take note of the book. "If there is a message, it is that employers need to iron out a good policy on sexual harassment so that managers know what to do and so the employees know what their rights are."

up



From April fools to Spiceworld ... a quirky look at the week ahead

Mind the spaghetti

On Wednesday, huddling Jeremy Beadles will be grinning from ear to ear: it's 1 April. The BBC, with its history of fooling listeners and viewers, is the one to watch out for. Richard Dimbleby's 1957 introduction of a film purporting to show spaghetti growing on trees in Switzerland is probably the most celebrated April fool. In 1995 Radio 4's *Today* programme duped listeners with a ruse about a water diver in a Devonshire village who could predict the winning lottery numbers.

Mad dog

Also on Wednesday, political pooches will be strutting their stuff in Westminster – but the Westminster Dog of the Year competition is no fool. For the likes of Herbie, a miniature wire haired dachshund, it is serious business. Owned by Ian Taylor, MP for Esher and Walton, Herbie was a contender last year but lost out in the final round to Vim, a Collie-cross owned by former Treasury minister Phillip Oppenheim. Herbie was most affronted at not winning and had to be coaxed into entering again but this year he is considered a hot tip. The favourite for this week's competition is the impressive Irish Wolfhound which can be seen taking Helen Southworth, Labour MP for Warrington South, for walks in St James Park. Findhorn, or Fin, weighs in at a massive 10 stone and is 33 inches at the shoulder. He should be having little problem seeing off Buster, the Staffordshire bull terrier owned by Roy Hattersley, which attacked a greylag goose in the same London park.



Own goals

There's no messing with football agent Rachel Anderson, either, when it comes to negotiating the fees for the players she represents, but there may be some foolish expressions at the HQ of the Professional Footballers Association. There will be three notable absences from the annual PFA awards on Sunday: the aforementioned Ms Anderson, Sports Minister Tony Banks and Football Association chief Graham Kelly. The PFA have told Ms Anderson she cannot attend because the event is "men only", so Mr Banks and Mr Kelly are boycotting the Grosvenor House Hotel bash in protest. For the record, David Beckham of Manchester Utd and Michael Owen of Liverpool are tipped to win the Players' Player of the Year and the Young Player of the Year respectively.

Scotty Spice

It's a good week for David Beckham's beloved, Posh Spice – Victoria Adams, as well. The Spice Girls kick off the UK leg of their Spiceworld tour in Glasgow on Saturday. Their first tour has already taken them from Zurich to Dortmund but back in Britain their latest tune is languishing at number four in the charts – "Stop" was the first Spice single not to go straight in at number one. But with all the UK dates sold out within hours of going on sale, and each Spice expecting to make £5m from the 30 nation tour, things can't be that bad.

— Michael Greenwood

The joys of a free-range childhood – alcopops and pollution



DINAH HALL

I SHALL have to give up reading the Sunday papers: they are definitely bad for my anxiety gene. Yesterday we were invited to worry – again – about children and lead: apparently they have found high levels of it in delinquent teenagers (I suspect they also found high levels of testosterone as well, but that wasn't mentioned). Is the answer, then, to keep children at home away from traffic pollution? Ah, no, then we'll just be adding to the problems of "battery-reared" children – subject of another alarmist ar-

ticle in a different newspaper. I find the idea of a kind of golden era when children played out in the street quite mystifying. I mean, what's so great about dodging the dog shit on the pavement, when there's probably a virtual reality version of it on Playstation? Looking back to my own childhood, I suppose I was a free-range kid who elected for a battery coop. My only memory of playing in the street was sitting on the front garden wall licking my lips and pretending to be Kathy Kirby's cousin (remember Kathy Kir-

by of *Secret Love* fame? That was some lip gloss). The rest of the time I was in the back garden looking for fairies and trying to fly. The benefits of playing out in the street, according to this article, are largely to do with socialisation – the very reason I, as a child, avoided it. Around here, of course, parents don't let their children play on the streets because there is a general perception that the ones who do are also allowed to go free-range amongst the 18-plus videos, alcopops, and car ignitions. Which, I suppose,

brings us full circle back to the lead.

I ALLOWED my own brood out of their coop on Friday for the annual torture that is the school disco. My eight-year-old spent the last one in tears – and so, consequently did I – because she was too inhibited to join in the Spice Girl dance. I realised it was all my fault – probably because I don't allow her to play outside on the streets, but largely because I had subliminally dressed her as a miniature version of me in baggy linen shorts and baggy

shirts. (Remember how sorry you felt at school for the children of older mothers because they always dressed them in home-made cardigans and ankle socks? I'm probably doing the Nineties equivalent of that to my children). So this time she went as a junior version of Posh Spice, but still ended up in tears: everybody else was All Saints. The five-year-old was too shy to dance (genes again) until the disco competition at which she raced on stage and transformed in to Lolita-meets-whirling-dervish. I was too shocked in to be pleased

that she had won the prize, particularly as other parents presumed she had learned her dancing technique from me in my alternative career as glamour dancer in a topless club. I recovered just in time to see the year six competition, and my son, the only boy dancing in the whole class – throwing himself about like Michael Jackson on speed. Obviously we have a very strong competitive gene in the family because, having skulked in a corner all night with a bag of crisps, he went out there to win, swiping the prize from under

the nose of the girl-vamps doing the Macarena behind him. The school disco is a rite of passage for year six girls – last year's class ended up slow-dancing together, so this year's had unrealistic expectations of the boys metamorphosing from would-be Ronaldos in to Romcos. For weeks, they had spent break-times pairing each other off and stalking their potential conquests; consequently, on the night of the disco only three boys, possibly the most hormonally challenged in the class, turned up. And one was only there for the crisps.

THE INDEPENDENT

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A moral role on the world stage

WINSTON CHURCHILL left an awkward legacy to today's politicians. He turned the spirit of national self-preservation into the noblest of causes, the resistance to fascism, and he convinced us of our military prowess. Throughout the Cold War, the period of decolonisation and the adjustment to American power, the memory of Churchill has made straight thinking about Britain's place in the world difficult.

Two obsessions trail in his wake: one of Britain "punching above her weight", the other of the association of British foreign policy with morality. Tomorrow, as he rises to deliver the Winston Churchill lecture, George Robertson needs to face both obsessions squarely. It is said that Tony Blair intends to "rule the country by headline". And the headline on Mr Robertson's speech is: "No peace dividend."

But the smaller print is much more interesting than that. New Labour is beginning to feel its way towards a coherent foreign policy and defence posture. Ever since Robin Cook hung the millstone of an "ethical foreign policy" around the neck of a government that was only a matter of days old, Mr Blair must have regretted such an open invitation to critics. Now, however, Mr Robertson is beginning to use it to advantage.

The instinct to cut defence spending is strong and honourable, and it extends much further than the CND wing of the Labour Party. But Mr Robertson is seeking to set up against it the equally strong and honourable desire for Britain to play a moral role on the world stage. He wants to set out for Britain a mission as a kind of nuclear-tipped Sweden. If Britain has national competitive advantages in security matters, they are the professionalism of its armed forces and the global reach of its post-imperial interests.

Here, left and right can meet. For the left, tomorrow night's dismantling of the RAF's last nuclear bombs. For the right, the prospect of building two big aircraft carriers. Mr Blair's desire to play to the nationalist gallery – such as his muscular advocacy of the Eurofighter project – can be reconciled with Clare Short's extraordinary ambition to end world poverty.

So, we welcome Mr Robertson's emphasis on Britain's role as a global peacekeeper, while recognising that this is not an ethical ambition that comes cheap. But what the proposer of the annual ritual motion at Labour conferences calling for defence spending to be reduced to the west European average need to recognise is that it has already been cut by more than a quarter in real terms since the recent peak in 1985.

The question is what should happen after the present standstill, which runs up to the end of the inherited spending plans in April 2000. Mr Robertson and Mr Blair seem to be signalling that the period of consolidation will continue.

There is a case for that. It is much easier to achieve a radical re-ordering of defence priorities within a static overall budget. The incentive for internal efficiency is greatly enhanced if mandarins or top brass know that any savings they make will be ploughed straight back into other parts of their empire.

However, we doubt whether Mr Robertson is being radical enough. He intends to cut the size of the British Army in Germany, which is there only to stop the Russian tanks from rolling across the Elbe. But he intends to cut, not pull out altogether, leaving thousands of personnel and tanks there, when the arguments for maintaining any sort of presence in Germany are weak.

One is that it ensures stability in central Europe, a stability threatened, for example, by the break-up of Yugoslavia. But the fact that British soldiers live in barracks in Bavaria had nothing to do with our peace-keeping capability (or lack of it) in Bosnia.

The other argument is that to withdraw entirely would encourage the Americans to go home, too, by reinforcing the strong Congressional sentiment that Europe's defence should be a matter for Europe's taxpayers. Well, if the only way we can persuade the United States to contribute to Nato's commitments in Europe is by pointlessly stationing thousands of soldiers on the territory of a fellow member of the European Union, then there is something wrong with our arguments.

Mr Robertson should recall that Churchill said many things that embarrass those who claim him for Little England about the contribution of a united Europe to the cause of peace. So, while Britain's ambition to keep peace throughout the world might be an expensive one, there is still some of the dividend from the end of the Cold War to be cashed in.

Vote of no-confidence

THE STRANGE Death of Conservative England: the story continues. Of all the shocking news from Harrogate at the weekend, perhaps the most compelling was the fact that only 115,000 Tory members voted in the ballot on party reforms. It is easy to mock. This was the party that long-boasted a million members. That long proclaimed itself the most successful election-winning machine in the democratic world. Now it has a smaller membership than Mr Blair's new-fangled party, which was only invented the other day, and only one member in three bothers to vote in a ballot on historic changes unthinkable 12 months ago – a turnout that would disgrace an inner-city council by-election.

But that is internal democracy for you: it reveals all kinds of unpleasant truths. Mr Hague's drive to create a one-member-one-vote party is absolutely right. But it has exposed the hollowiness at the heart of modern Toryism: there is no vision to enthuse the members and potential members. Perhaps it is too early for that, but until Mr Hague gives us something worth joining a party for, the Tories are condemned to irrelevance.



MILES KINGTON

BY SPECIAL request, here is more of the long-lost Shakespeare play *The History of King Tony*, which chronicles the doings of Tony Blair and his reign over Britain...

The scene is the Palace at Westminster, where Duke Prescott and several noblemen are conferring secretly. Enter Earl Dobson.
Dobson: I would have audience with King Anthony.

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King Tony: Au revoir, messieurs! Je m'en vais chez moi! Ah, yes, my grasp of French has made its mark!

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And inherit his vast empire everywhere! The spin doctors vanish, smiling sardonically. King Tony: Stay, you devilish media hacks, oh stay! And tell me more before you fly away! One spin doctor returns.

Spin Doctor: King Tony, I will tell you all I know. If I can be Minister with no portfolio. King Tony: Yes, yes, you can! I'll promise anything.

If I can follow Rupert, the great media king! More of this riveting stuff tomorrow...

Child choices

FOR once the estimable Suzanne Moore (27 March) has strayed over the line from provocative comment into smug self-congratulation. She talks about the choices she had made in having two children as a single woman and knowing how tough it is.

To get to her position on the economic ladder, which is what has made her choice possible, both her brilliant talent and fantastic good luck are essential. For her then to suggest we do what Jodie Foster did and go and have artificial insemination is to add insult to injury. It's not the AID that makes Jodie exceptional, it's her wealth.

I know far too many women in the predicament she describes with such contempt to be able to accept her, for once, simplistic line of reasoning. They are bright, talented, hard-working women who do not whinge. And for the record, the proverbial Cornish sofa features nowhere in any of these people's economies, most of whom, like myself, are one month's rent or mortgage away from destitution.

Am I really colluding with a backlash in hoping to have a child without losing my home, my pension, my bargaining power and every bit of independence I have fought for? With respect, Suzanne Moore never had to make that choice. SUSANNAH PERRY London E5

IT IS said that there are so many nice, capable unmarried women in their thirties who would like to marry and have children but who feel they may have missed the boat. The reason for this situation is far more complex than Suzanne Moore's simplistic, accusation analysis allows.

The feminists rightly persuaded women to be more career-minded and to achieve some financial independence. But there is more involved than career-mindedness. Social changes since the Seventies have had profound effects on the 18-39 age group that must be taken into account. My generation did not "shack

up" before marriage – let alone with the first person who came along. Young people could afford to share accommodation in city areas where there was a great deal of socialising because working hours allowed a decent balance between work and play. "Shacking up" takes people out of circulation at a time when they ought to be playing the field. High rents have forced many young people to stay on with their parents or to live in uncentral areas. This takes them out of circulation. And the macho business culture of excessively long working hours takes conscientious people out of circulation. DR ANNE-CAROLE CHAMBER Ross and Cromarty, Scotland

I FIND it amazing that Suzanne Moore can take most of a page backing a single woman's right to have children, without once considering a child's right to have a father. It seems easier to me to argue for a child's right to two parents, than to support a woman's right to have a child without a partner, yet Suzanne Moore appears to place a woman's rights above those of a child's. I hope I have misinterpreted her position. CHARLIE ROBERTSON London N19

Deaths in prison

ALTON MANNING was killed by the brutal force used on him by seven men. It is quite preposterous for anyone to try to explain the death of Mr Manning and the other six black men who have died in custody by reference to a predisposition on their part to succumb to asphyxia ("Racist" prison chief is urged to quit", 27 March.)

In order to have found that Mr Manning was "unlawfully killed", the inquest jury would have had to

LETTERS

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have been sure "beyond a reasonable doubt" that he had been killed in an incident of murder or manslaughter. That is exactly the same standard of proof as is required in criminal trial. This is remarkably convenient for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) whose official Code says that prosecutions will be brought where there is a "realistic prospect of conviction". They have, in the inquest jury's verdict, a ready-made test indicating that there is such a realistic prospect.

Thus, it is presumably just a matter of time before those who killed Mr Manning are prosecuted. DR GARY SLAPPER Open University, Milton Keynes

RICHARD TILT may have been either right or wrong in his assertion that "blacks suffocate more easily than whites". If he was wrong with malicious intent, he deserves criticism. However, if he was either right or wrong with sincere intent after receiving faulty information, he should not be pilloried as a racist.

There are serious dangers in allowing the politically correct lobby to stifle genuine scientific debate if they do not like some of the possible outcomes of the debate. We must always insist that open factual discussion is protected from attempts to stifle it for the sake of political convenience. SAM BOOTE Keyworth, Nottingham

After Jonesboro

THE horror in Jonesboro will touch the hearts of most who hear of it. Please can it reach people's brains too? I am particularly struck that the children and teachers were trapped outside their building by a self-locking system. Around me, as I visit schools in my area, I have:

■ locked myself out of school whilst on playground duty; ■ let adults I do not recognise into after-school activities when they have tapped on the window for admittance;

■ noted that it takes an extra adult to hold a door open to admit adults they do not recognise to evening functions;

■ interrupted the secretary's work to gain admittance to schools. At my children's school, this morning, I let myself in. I spoke to the secretary, too far from her office to be door keeper, and checked refreshments for a PTA function to raise money to support a poorly funded school. I wasted no one's time.

If there is money to spend in schools (and there is, because locks are in place) can we please spend it on reducing class sizes so that the world raises fewer disaffected loners? Locks will not stop this sort of person finding victims in a spectacular setting. Connecting with the social world may. ANI HARRIS New Mills, Derbyshire

THE saddest thing about the Arkansas shooting is that it will take a lot worse than that to persuade Americans that the right to carry arms against one's fellow citizens is a stupidity in any state, but an obsession in a modern democracy. K LEAMAN London W9

Cook's tour

I HAVE just read your front-page article (27 March) about British Jews snubbing Robin Cook over his Israel visit. I do feel it is about time that some person in a position of influence puts Israel in its place and I am glad that Robin Cook had the wisdom to do it.

How can British Jews talk of peace when Israel persistently hurls Palestinians (with the world turning a blind eye) by infringing on the no-mans-land between the two countries, by building permanent settlements on it. If Israel was really interested in peace it would not be invoking problems, and it would be nice to see "leading British Jews" being a little more objective, and in so doing really support the peace initiative. DERRICK SARGO Edinburgh

Defence of the realm

LIKE Andrew Marr I was reminded of "Protect and Survive" (the government's helpful leaflet on how to survive a nuclear war) when I was reading about anthrax attacks from Iraq.

I was just contemplating how this scare could be turned into a policy when Paul Beaver of *Jane's Defence Weekly* suggested on Radio 4 that the Territorial Army (apparently under threat from the Defence Review) could become a civil defence force.

But surely, our Trident nuclear weapon system is supposed to deter "rogue states" from threatening us with their weapons of mass destruction?

Time for a new defence policy, I think. NIGEL CHAMBERLAIN Penrith, Cumbria

Name that tune

IT WAS Eric Morecambe, not Ernie Wise (Leader of 27 March – "Missing Notes of Welfare Reform") at the piano during the celebrated sketch with André Previn (for the purposes of the exercise known as "Andrew Previn") who declared – after the first faltering har of the Grieg Piano Concerto – "I've played the right notes but not necessarily in the right order."

Many a failed politician may have echoed those sentiments. PHILIP ASHTON Glossop, Derbyshire

Continuing a Shakespearian tale of our times: Act Four, Tony does a deal with the devil

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Beat the Millennium Bug or everyone catches a cold



TONY
BLAIR

ON DEFUSING A
TIME BOMB

TICKING away inside many of our computers is a potential technical time bomb. From the computers and electronic systems which pay our wages to those which control our traffic lights, from the computers on which our children look up encyclopedia entries to the one on which I'm writing this, all the computers now vital to the way we live modern life must be adapted as we approach the year 2000.

The new millennium will be a clear cause for celebration – in Britain, and around the world. But in the run-up to the year 2000, what's known as the Millennium Bug is a big issue – and a big problem. The root cause of it sounds trivial: the failure of many operating systems, in PCs, mainframes or embedded chips, to distinguish between the year 2000 and the year 1900. I'm no information technology expert, but I know that, unless we act, the consequences of the Millennium Bug could be severe.

Many business leaders are warning that, unless the problem of the Millennium Bug is tackled as a priority, we could be facing a serious threat to our economic performance. Today, I shall be talking and listening to people from all over Britain who run small and medium-sized companies, making sure they understand the importance of being certain that their firms are ready.

Britain is leading the way in tackling the Bug. Just as we have taken action on education, health, crime and jobs to ensure that, step by step, Britain is getting better, we are taking action on the Millennium Bug. We have made it a priority at this year's G8 meeting of the world's richest countries, for our Presidency of the European Union and for the Europe-Asia Summit meeting in London this week.

Global awareness remains patchy. In a recent survey by the World Bank, only 37 out of 128 borrowing member countries said they were aware of it. Only six countries have set up national awareness-raising campaigns like Action 2000 – our drive to help companies and people in Britain deal with the problem.

Developing countries, in particular, will need more help. That is why, today, I will announce that we are putting £10m into a new World Bank Trust Fund to provide experts and training to developing countries. We hope that our G8 and EU partners will be able to follow suit.

At home, if we want to remain strong and competitive into the next millennium, we have to deal with this problem now. There is a risk that our growth prospects will be damaged as companies divert resources to cope with computer failures. Some might even go bust because they can't fix them.

The Action 2000 campaign is helping raise awareness in the private sector. Today, I will

tell them that we are increasing their budget from £1m to £17m to help it do even more.

With a national publicity campaign backed up by a website and a hotline to direct small and medium businesses to where they can get help, Action 2000 is having an effect. Awareness in that sector is now at nearly 100 per cent. But 25 per cent of companies haven't started taking action yet and they need to do it now.

So, there has been progress, but not enough. Today, we are unveiling a new package of measures to help companies acquire the skills they need. Using £70m announced in Gordon Brown's Budget, we will help small- and medium-sized companies develop IT skills to assess and fix systems which will be affected by the bug.

We will offer a £1,300 time-limited grant for people to train in how to look for and solve the Year 2000 problem. If we get the response from business we are looking for, there will be an army of 20,000 "bug busters" fully trained between now and next April. This is a perfect opportunity to train young people in IT skills or to bring older unemployed or retired people back into the workforce, launched on a new career in information technology.

Business will need to know that its efforts to tackle the bug are matched in the public sector. There's little point having sorted out your business if the Inland Revenue, the benefits system, hospitals and local authorities have failed to sort out theirs.

On coming to office, one of the first things we did was to ask for an update of the Government's Year 2000 plans. David Clark, the minister responsible for public services, is working to make sure that all parts of the public sector match the standards of the best. He's reporting to Parliament every three months on progress and has estimated that tackling the bug problem in central government will cost in the region of £400m. The best estimate of the cost of dealing with it across the public sector is up to £3bn. That figure might, of course, change. However, we are assured that money is being set aside from within existing budgets to cover it.

Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, chairs a Cabinet group to co-ordinate action on the bug across public and private sectors. And, today, I am setting up a new public/private sector team based in the Cabinet Office to ensure the delivery of that better co-ordination.

Within the public sector, the Health Service and local government have a special responsibility. Without careful preparation, there could be major disruption to essential services such as benefit payments or even to emergency services such as hospitals, the fire and the police.

Some problems can only be tackled locally because each area faces different risks. Today, John Prescott and Sir Jeremy Beecham, the chairman of the Local Government Association, are writing to every local authority leader and chief executive asking them to set up their own task forces to raise awareness in their local areas and to co-ordinate action between the private and public sector locally.

I know that many companies and organisations are well advanced in dealing with this problem. I know that others are working hard to overcome the difficulties they are facing. But I want to be sure that every company, every organisation and every computer-user in Britain is taking action to defuse this technical time bomb – so that Britain can enter the new millennium confident of being able to meet its challenges.

Why does the Titanic so fascinate us? It's a story about the hour of our death



A ship of grace and power, sinkable perhaps but too beautiful to die, a vessel whose streamlined funnels spoke of the future Photograph: Daily Mirror

Arabs see the West's weakness, others spot sexual symbolism. Robert Fisk finds meaning behind a disaster

THE TITANIC sank on my father's thirteenth birthday. He always remembered the day, not just because his Birkenhead home was across the Mersey from the head office of the White Star Line but because the Fisks were seafarers. My grandfather Edward was an officer on the Cutty Sark, a 19th-century clipper ship. The tea clipper's crew in Sydney – now in the museum aboard the restored sailing ship at Greenwich – contains a face that looks startlingly similar to my own.

Four decades later, my mum and dad took me to see *A Night to Remember* at the old Maidstone Granada cinema. I still recall how my mother reached for her handkerchief as Kenneth More – playing an avuncular Second Officer Lightoller – gently took a sleeping child from the arms of his doomed father and put the little boy in the lifeboat.

Three years ago, I was talking to the daughter of a *Titanic* victim in the tiny Lebanese Christian village of Kfar Mishki; 123 Lebanese were down on

the *Titanic* but their families received no compensation from the White Star Line – they had boarded as wait-listed passengers at Cherbourg and their names were thus never entered on the official passenger list. Their fate is represented in James Cameron's new film by a demeaning three-second scene of a man in Turkish clothes trying to translate a list of the liner's emergency instructions.

Yet, the publicity surrounding the latest sinkapic cannot account for our fascination with the *Titanic*. On a flight out of Beirut last week, I found three passengers – two Lebanese and a Frenchman – reading books about the ship, one of them Walter Lord's original account of the disaster that inspired *A Night to Remember*, another Robert Ballard's record of his underwater discovery of the wreck.

Of course, the disaster has long been regarded as symbolic – of the class system that lay like a cancer at the heart of British society, of the arrogance of power that would be swept away in the world war which broke out two years later. And it's easy to see how the nobility of sacrifice shown by those who believed in women and children first – the rules of war which held true in the 19th century – was abandoned amid the final savagery aboard the doomed ship when "every man for himself" was so soon to encapsulate the chaos of our 20th-century wars.

Several Arabs have insisted to me that the ship's fate proves how false are our superior claims for western technology (along with Cruise missiles, Stealth bombers and other anti-Saddam devices) and that God truly proved greater than man when the *Titanic* went down (God presumably being represented by the iceberg). Yet far away, in Dublin, Kevin Myers has been arguing in the *Irish Times* that the new awareness of the vessel's fate should help his countrymen come to regard the *Titanic* as an Irish story. It was, after all, designed by Irishmen and built by Irishmen (at Harland and Wolff in Belfast).

Cameron's new version of the disaster, it is First Officer Murdoch who starts shooting (at Irishmen, of course) as the steerage hordes try to save their lives.

And it is significant – though missed by the critics – that the new *Titanic* is distinctly anti-British. Courage is shown by the "unsinkable" Mollie Brown but especially by the fictional American Winslett-DiCaprio duo. British passengers are almost invariably stuck-up, deceitful or violent. Kenneth More's avuncular Lightoller has been replaced by a night-mare school prefect who points his revolver at the steerage hordes and screams at them: "Get back – or I'll shoot you all like dogs."

But the star of all the *Titanic* films – and of our fascination – remains the ship itself. Fr F W Browne was an Irish priest who travelled on the very first Southampton-Queensdown sector of the *Titanic*'s transatlantic route and took a remarkable series of photographs of the first day and a half of the doomed voyage. His last picture of the *Titanic* – the very last photograph ever – shows a ship of grace and power, sinkable perhaps but too beautiful to die, a vessel whose streamlined funnels speak of the future rather than the past.

Some have suggested a sexual message in the *Titanic* saga, the virgin ship on its maiden

voyage ravaged by the iceberg. In an earlier American film of the sinking – in which George C Scott plays a bug-eyed Captain Smyth – a female *Titanic* passenger is raped by a White Star Line crew member only three minutes before the iceberg is seen penetrating the vulnerable iron skin of the ship.

Ultimately, the ship is one reason why *Titanic* could win no best actor awards. Because the best actor is the machine which, in an odd way, makes Cameron's repulsive 10 seconds of silence for the dead at the Oscars ceremony – that's one Hollywood second for every 150 victims – all the more sedate.

Yet there is one sequence in the film of unmistakable beauty and power, a few seconds that explain the ship's enduring fascination. It shows the *Titanic* on its last day, disappearing in the late afternoon across a massive expanse of pale green Atlantic as the old lady survivor recounts her story. "It was the last time," she says, "that sunlight would ever shine upon the *Titanic*." And it is this element of inevitable death that draws the world back, again and again, to the night of 14 April, 1912. Glorious to the end, its lights blazing over the night-time sea, the story of the *Titanic* is about the hour of our death. I think that's why my father – dead these past six years – often talked about the ship that died on his birthday.

Why Germany envies elective dictatorship



ANNE
MCELVOY

ON LESSONS
FROM ABROAD

AFTER a surfeit of New Labour's bouncy triumphalism, you might just find yourself hankering for the straightening smack of pessimism. In that case, visit Germany. Its national anthems were adapted to fit national moods, the Federal Republic's would currently be one of the more depressing Leonard Cohen numbers and not D-Ream's *Things Can Only Get Better*.

This is nothing new. Ever since I first went there as a teenager, there has been a German crisis. The first A-level essays we wrote in German were about the early 1980s trauma of *Schulstress* – the intolerable strain of being educated. Then there was the environment and the arms race, nuclear power and the effect of Chernobyl on vegetables in the Rhineland. With 1989 came the mythical threat of starving Russians pouring over the Oder-Neisse line.

These anxieties were either ephemeral or easily addressed. The rise of the Greens changed government policy on deforestation and curtailed pollution. The deployment of Cruise missiles did not lead to nuclear holocaust. Russians flooding to Berlin today are not a raggle-taggle army of despair, but well-behaved gentlemen in large if often ill-gotten Mercedes buying artworks and Cartier.

All countries have their way of seeming peculiar to outsiders. Germany's is the tendency of this most stable and

prosperous society to mutter to itself at regular intervals: "We're all doomed." Now, however, with the solid Deutschmark about to melt into the less reliable Euro, unemployment approaching five million and a tired coalition at the end of its natural life, it seems as good a time as any to look on the dark side.

The Königswinter conference, the annual gathering where British and German public figures exchange worries, has just been held in Edinburgh. Arnulf Baring, the historian, was the official Cassandra. This befits a man whose latest book, *Is Germany Finished?* has a contents list which goes, "Germany's future... failed innovation, shrinking business class, scandalous subsidies, fatal unemployment, stifling bureaucracy, rotten education system, ageing society..." Baring's views are not wholly accepted in the German elite, but at the conference, bankers, managers and politicians alike shifted uneasily in their chairs as he spoke.

The difference between doom-mongers and those of the 1980s is that the PR voting system and federal government now seem to be part of the problem and not the solution. The relationship between regional government and the centre is, in theory, a near-perfect exercise in local democracy. But it is expensive. It duplicates functions and inhibits change. The fundamentals of Germany's success –

single-union plants in industry which gave it "modernised" trade unions from the start and steady monetary policy from the Bundesbank – were imposed by the allies. It is easier for a consensual system to maintain than to innovate.

PR does not help. The opposition Social Democrats are constrained by the view that their likely bedfellows – other than in a grand coalition – are the Greens. Germans like the Greens in their place, that is influencing policy but not making it. The prospect of them holding the balance of power is

On the possible switch to a PR system, they thought that we should think twice and then say no. "It is obvious that we have to have it because of our recent past," said one young businessman. "But you don't have to wear this sackcloth. It's better that, whether you have a Thatcher or a Blair, they can make decisions and enact them without endless delay."

While British newspapers cavilled about the lack of concrete proposals in the welfare Green Paper, the Germans considered it a dynamic leap. Their own social security system

The UK could profit from Germany's lesson that too much consensualism is as damaging as too little

too racy to contemplate. All of this comes at a time when this weekend's conference was convened in Scotland to mark devolution and while, elsewhere, Lord Jenkins of Hillhead is presiding over his commission on electoral reform for the UK.

I straw-poll German guests on these two matters. On devolution, they thought it blindingly obvious that the Scots should have a say in running their own affairs. "What took you so long?" asked one politician. What indeed.

encourages people to become "benefit entrepreneurs". The middle classes are the worst offenders. The record for long-stay parking in higher education is held by a man who was an undergraduate for 13 years.

On electoral reform, Germany's experience convinces me that it is impossible to avoid a central tension – between the desire to maximise representative democracy and to deliver strong government capable of implementing reforms.

At present, our electoral method is a powerful force for change but fails to build consensus. In Germany, each voter's preference is significant but the outcome nationally is a parliament of quite extraordinary dullness. The elected second chamber replicates the *modus operandi* of the first – beware a Blairised House of Lords – and politicians resemble each other far more closely than they resemble most of their voters.

Let us be bold enough to accept that no single electoral system can serve all the needs of a United Kingdom which is in the process of embracing its own form of federalism, but which could profit from Germany's lesson that too much consensualism is as damaging as too little.

In local government and elections for mayors, I have no desire to be restricted by my party political views. Anyone who can prove themselves an effective provider – or regulator – of services is welcome to my vote. But I don't regard general elections and national government in the same way.

Supporters of New Labour's key reforms, in welfare, health and, hopefully, education, know that such progress is only possible because an earlier minority government made some unpopular, distinctly non-consensual decisions. Germany searches in vain for "Our Tony Blair". But it is easier to get a Mr Blair in a system that gave you Margaret Thatcher first.

Life saving treatments
for children
with cancer

To find out more read our special report.
Making Cancer History on Wednesday
1st April in The Eye

THE INDEPENDENT

cancer research campaign

Why projected returns paint a less than rosy picture

THE WEEK AHEAD



PETER THAL LARSEN

WHAT next for the Footsie? That's the question most investors are asking themselves after a manic first quarter in which the index of 100 leading shares rose by almost a fifth. The rise has surprised even the most optimistic of market observers, who had pencilled in year-end targets of 6,000 for the Footsie but never expected the market to get there in less than three months.

The first trick is explaining the reasons for the rise. According to Mark Brown and Gareth Williams, equity strategists at ABN AMRO, the investment bank, the re-rating of global equities in recent years can be explained by measuring Economic Value Added (EVA) - the difference between a company's return on capital and the cost of that capital. They show that, since the early 1980s, the world's 11 largest industrialised countries have been producing a positive EVA.

What's more, the level of EVA is forecast to hit a new high in 1998. So far, so good. But since the stock market is effectively a way of discounting future expectations, the current level of EVA matters less than what is likely to happen in the future. And here the picture becomes less rosy. Because if returns on investment are high, companies are likely to invest more, thereby dragging down returns.

Another threat comes from pay rates. Although companies have been successful in increasing the share of economic cake gobbled up by profits - at the expense of workers' pay - this is unlikely to last. Private-sector pay rates are already rising by an average of more than 5 per cent a year. If this is sustained, profits will come under pressure.

This analysis leads Brown and Williams to argue that the quoted sector, excluding fi-

ancial stocks, has gone ex-growth. Although company analysts are still forecasting earnings growth of about 7 per cent for non-financial stocks, a top-down analysis suggests this is more likely to be 3 per cent.

They argue that investors should take refuge in financial and services companies, which offer some protection from this trend. If you're not a fund manager with a large portfolio to invest, however, it may be better to stay out of the market altogether.

The coming week is dominated by results from companies in the building & construction sector. By Friday, investors should have a good idea of whether recent reports of a slowdown in the sector are accurate or not.

Shares in Blue Circle, which reports full-year results on Monday, have staged a recovery this year after being pummeled by

sterling and the Asian crisis. The cement company is generally viewed as one of the best-run firms in the sector. But given its exposure to economic turmoil in Malaysia and increasing price competition in Chile, analysts will be carefully scrutinising its overseas activities. NatWest Markets expects profits to rise

to £340m from £297.6m. Also in cement is Rugby Group, which reports the following day. Investors will be looking for evidence that recent cost savings are coming through in the bottom line. Confirmation that the new £120m cement kiln, due to be up and running in August, is on schedule will also be welcomed. The new plant will allow Rugby to close down smaller, less efficient kilns. Finally, analysts will also be trying to gauge the exposure of the group's Australian division to turmoil in the Far East. Pre-tax profits are expected to be £74m (£60m).

On Wednesday, construction group Alfred McAlpine should produce full-year profits of £21m, up from £9.4m on the back of a booming construction sector. The company will also face questions about its enlarged homes division.

Life is tougher at RMC, the

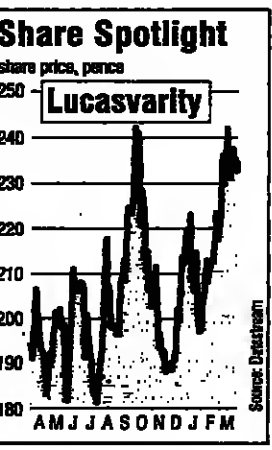
building materials group which is struggling to cope with the depressed German construction market. Although profits from the country probably rose by about 4 per cent in local currency, this turns into a 15 per cent drop once translated into sterling. Overall, profits expected up 4 per cent at £306m (£295.3m).

Manchester United kicks off the week with six months' results on Monday, fresh from a vital victory over Wimbledon in the Premier League. The Reds have had a terrible month. They were knocked out of the European Champion's League by Monaco and have Arsenal breathing down their necks in the Premiership. But that won't be reflected in the results, which are expected to show that profit before tax and transfers increased from £15.7m to £17.4m. Analysts will be looking for details of a new shirt sponsorship deal. United's

long-standing agreement with Sharp runs out this year and will not be renewed. Names including Ford are believed to be chasing the contract, which will set the benchmark for other football clubs.

Motor components group LucasVarity reports results tomorrow. Investors are still unconvinced that the transatlantic merger, now almost two years old, has delivered the promised benefits in the key braking systems division. With all the cost-cutting out of the way analysts will be looking for an improvement in margins.

Chief executive Victor Rice will also face questions about acquisitions. Following the sale of its heavy duty braking division to Caterpillar last December, LucasVarity could easily splash out more than £1bn on an acquisition. However, it may instead beef up its rolling programme of share buy-backs.



Stock	Price	Weekly	Index
Alcoholic Beverages			
001 Aldi (Dumfries)	20.00	+0.00	41.04
002 Asda	20.00	+0.00	41.04
003 Asda	20.00	+0.00	41.04
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009 Asda	20.00	+0.00	41.04
010 Asda	20.00	+0.00	41.04

Stock	Price	Weekly	Index
Banking			
011 Bank of Scotland	20.00	+0.00	41.04
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Stock	Price	Weekly	Index
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Stock	Price	Weekly	Index
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Banking	779.00	+2.00	13	8.1	0	0
Insurance	220.00	+1.00	13	8.1	428	0
Pharmaceuticals	3.30	-1.00	4.3	8.1	0	0
Manufacturing	3.30	-1.00	2.1	20.5	759	0
Services	309.00	-1.00	4.0	9.3	286	0
Technology	65.30	+1.00	4.0	9.3	286	0
Energy	0.50	-1.00	7.0	7.5	7.5	2002
Smallcap	0.50	-1.00	7.0	7.5	7.5	2002
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Jan Leschly's package is matched by few executives anywhere

£66m for SB boss in biggest UK pay deal

By Andrew Yates

JAN LESCHLY, chief executive of SmithKline Beecham, has become the highest-paid director ever seen in a British boardroom. The former tennis star has been awarded share options and incentive schemes currently worth £66m. The share package comes on top of the £2.4m he earned last year, which included a bonus of more than £1.5m.

Mr Leschly is now one of the best-paid executives in the world. However, the City is beginning to question whether he is worth such a huge pay package. SmithKline could face demands to curb Mr Leschly's lavish awards. Institutional investors are becoming increasingly concerned about the value of shares and options awarded to Mr Leschly. They are particularly worried that he has accumulated a vast fortune despite coming under heavy criticism for failing to secure a merger first with American Home Products and then Glaxo Wellcome in the space of a month. The breakdown in merger talks wiped billions of pounds off the value of the drugs giant and caused widespread consternation in the City. Leschly's fortune dwarfs that of Sir Richard Sykes, his opposite number at Glaxo Wellcome.

Mr Leschly, 57, is one of the



Jan Leschly: Winning ways

has he did on the tennis courts.

Mr Leschly now lives mainly in America, based at SmithKline's Philadelphia headquarters. He left Denmark in 1979 to join Squibb Corporation, the US pharmaceutical group, where he showed his competitive streak by quickly climbing the corporate ladder. But after losing out in a fierce battle to win control of the group he left in 1990 to join SmithKline, becoming chief executive four years later. Born into a military family, he has always led from the front, maintaining an iron grip on the group. His ego and determination to keep control of SmithKline are believed to have contributed to the breakdown in merger talks.

SmithKline's non-executive directors have come under pressure from some shareholders to resurrect a merger with Glaxo Wellcome by removing Mr Leschly. However, if SmithKline is taken over he would be entitled to cash in his share options, prompting the biggest corporate pay-off ever seen.

SmithKline has one of the most generous share option and incentive schemes in the world. Jean-Pierre Garnier, chief operating officer, is sitting on a paper profit from options worth £20m and Hugh Collum, the group's finance director, stands to make £12m.

But the City is questioning whether he is worth such a huge amount

most successful businessman to have come out of Denmark. But he came to the world of business relatively late in life.

Mr Leschly first showed his winning ways on the tennis court where he was ranked in the world's top ten, played in the Danish Davis Cup team and reached a Wimbledon quarter final. He has demonstrated the same drive for success and ruthlessness in the boardroom



Winning aroma: Gareth Lloyd Jones (left) and Simon Brookes, two of Madisons founders

Rich coffee flotation

By Andrew Yates

THREE founders of Madisons coffee bars stand to become multi-millionaires when the group floats on the Alternative Investment Market.

Gareth Lloyd Jones, who used to run Tie-Rack outlets, Simon Brookes, a former property expert with Sir Robert McAlpine, and Mark Horrocks, a fund manager, all stand to make paper profits running into millions. They are also considering making an instant profit by selling shares in the flotation. City Gourmet, the group which owns the chain, will be valued at £15m-£20m when it joins the market in the next few months.

The three entrepreneurs bought the business in 1995. The group operates seven coffee bars and plans to open 12 sites during 1998. It is looking at new outlets in Cardiff and Manchester. The coffee-bar concept was imported from

America and the idea is catching on fast in the UK. The popularity of the new bars has prompted Seattle Coffee Company to unveil its own flotation plans. However, City Gourmet claims that by offering a wide range of teas and sandwiches it appeals to a wider audience than rivals.

Meanwhile John Weatherill, a former mobile phone salesman, and his family are sitting on a £15m fortune after JWE, the mobile phone distributor, confirmed plans to float on the stock market next month. Mr Weatherill is selling shares worth £3m in the flotation and his family will still own more than 60 per cent of the group, which is likely to be valued at around £20m. JWE has released a pathfinder prospectus predicting pre-tax profits of not less than £1.5m for the year to March. JWE Telecom has a chain of 21 mobile phone shops and acts as a distributor of phones to 300 dealers. It is raising roughly £4m of new money to expand the business.

Anti-fraud ICL plan in doubt

By Michael Harrison

DOUBTS are growing about the Government's commitment to a £1.5bn project awarded to ICL in 1996 to automate the benefit payments system - one of the biggest contracts handed out under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

A row has also broken out between the Social Security Secretary, Harriet Harman, and the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, over the two-year delay, which had been forecast to produce savings of at least £150m a year by stamping out benefit fraud. There was no mention of the project in the Green Paper on Welfare Reform published last week by Frank Field, the minister responsible, even though eradication of benefit fraud is one of the Government's key priorities.

The project involves automating all benefit payments through the network of 19,000 Post Offices by replacing girocheques and order books with electronic smart cards. The Benefits Agency, which awarded the contract, is simultaneously updating its own computer systems at a cost of hundreds of millions of pounds.

The system was supposed to have been operational over handling 890 million transactions a year, but it will not be running fully until 2000. So far the system has only been installed in 300 Post Offices and is being tested with only 150,000 of the country's 19 million claimants. The projected fraud savings have been factored into the Department of Social Security's existing budgets. The delay in introducing the system has left a large hole in those departmental budgets.

ICL Pathway, the ICL subsidiary running the project, has spent £125m installing equipment and training staff. Its total spend by the time the system is up and running is expected to reach £600m. It will earn revenues, estimated at between £100m and £150m, by charging a royalty every time a card is used to make a benefit payment.

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A leaked memo from Ms Harman to the President of the Board of Trade, Margaret Beckett, written last month, disclosed that ICL was seeking "significantly more money" to complete the project. This would put the department under "financial and contractual pressure". ICL executives have denied that they are seeking to renegotiate the terms of the contract and insist that the project remains on course.

However, there are doubts about whether the Government wants to continue with the project at all, which was awarded by the previous Social Security Secretary, Peter Lilley. The Government's Social Exclusion Unit, launched last autumn by Peter Mandelson, Minister without Portfolio, is putting pressure on high-street banks to make bank accounts available to everyone.

If this happened, social security benefits of all types could be paid straight into bank accounts by direct debit, making the expensive computerised ICL system redundant. A Post Office executive said: "There is clearly a problem between the DSS and the Treasury. But the bigger issue is whether the current government is committed to the project. The last one was and we are still waiting to see whether this one is."

The system is initially intended to eliminate cash-on-hand fraud through the use of stolen order books. But ICL believes that ultimately it could be used much more widely in the bigger battle against entitlement fraud, which is estimated to cost £4bn a year.

The smart benefit cards would allow the Benefits Agency to keep sophisticated records of where and when benefits are paid up and down the country, so helping to detect patterns of fraudulent claims.

Tim Waterstone near to winning back booksellers

WH SMITH is set to complete today the sale of its Waterstone's bookselling business to HMV Media, the new company headed by Tim Waterstone. The £300m deal will pave the way for Smith's to return around £200m to shareholders. An announcement on the cash return is expected in the next few weeks. The completion of the Waterstone's deal will trigger a £607,000 payment to Alan Giles, who runs the Waterstone's chain.

Bid for Savoy to top £500m

BLACKSTONE, the American investment group, is expected to table a firm £500m-plus bid for the Savoy in the next few weeks and has emerged as front-runner to acquire the luxury hotels group. MediTrust, the US real estate group, is understood to have dropped out of the race. There are also doubts about a bid from Starwood Lodging which will be hit by the US Congress' decision to clamp down on a tax loophole.

Germans eye Hepworth

SPECULATION is mounting that Vaillant, a family-owned German boiler maker, could launch a £650m-plus bid for Hepworth, the troubled building materials group. United Technology, a US group, could also be tempted to enter the fray. Jean-Francois Chene, Hepworth's new chief executive, is expected to unveil a shake-up of the group when he announces annual results tomorrow.

Firms to recruit more

THE DEMAND for staff will rise across the country in the second quarter of 1998, particularly in consumer-led industries, according to the Manpower Quarterly Survey of Employment Prospects. The survey predicts the highest balance of companies planning to increase recruitment against those planning to shed workers for nine years. A separate survey on job creation in small businesses found new jobs fell by 10 per cent in the first quarter with only 18 per cent of those surveyed creating new jobs during that period.

BMW poised to take Rolls

By John Willcock

SPECULATION mounted over the weekend that Rolls-Royce Motors is to fall into BMW's hands this week, spurred by a report in the German news magazine Focus on Saturday.

Vickers has been in talks with BMW and Volkswagen over the sale of its luxury car maker, with analysts pencilling in a selling price of £300m-£400m. Other bidders include the venture capital outfit Doughty Hanson and UK businessman Kevin Mndley, a former director of Rover Group, although sources close to the talks have discounted their chances of success.

The German magazine cited BMW's existing relationship with the British company as helping its cause. BMW has a joint venture with the aero engine side of Rolls-Royce, which split from the car maker 25 years ago, and supplies Vickers with engines for the Silver Seraph, the latest model introduced by the Rolls-Royce car makers.

The decision by Sir Colin

Chandler, Vickers' chairman, to put up the car maker for auction initially drew criticism from BMW, but may still prompt a higher offer from Volkswagen.

The aero-engine group which still owns the Rolls-Royce name has an effective veto over any sale of the car maker, and is known to favour the BMW bid.

Daimler-Benz, the German industrial group and maker of Mercedes-Benz, has pulled out of the auction and is thinking of launching its own super-luxury brand.

"German car companies

think they have to be active in the luxury or super-luxury segment. They have to break into this through Rolls-Royce or (its sister brand) Bentley before they will develop their own models," Sabine Blumel at IML Sigeo said last week.

"VW could try to outbid BMW and it could be that VW would be more attractive if it does ask Vickers to supply the engines. I personally think VW could do more with Rolls-Royce than BMW, but from the point of view of Rolls-Royce, it might be nicer to be owned by BMW."

Information released on Budget Day made no mention of Furt's but did change the law to levy capital gains tax at 34 per cent on all trusts. Until now, Furt's, a particular type of trust, enjoyed exemptions from the higher rate of CGT.

While no exact figures are available, accountants estimate that more than 2,000 people use the arrangements. Most are highly paid executives at the country's top 350 companies and earn well into six figures.

The accountants KPMG say companies will have to increase contributions rapidly for senior employees in order to make up for the change.

Mary Carter, remuneration tax partner at KPMG, said: "Companies will need to review urgently the rate at which their contributions are made and consider increasing this rate to avoid employees being very materially disadvantaged."

The schemes have grown in popularity as executive pay rises have raced ahead of inflation. Because the earnings cap only rises in line with the retail price index, increasing numbers of employees now earn more than the cap.

KPMG calculates that a 44-year-old employee, whose company contributed £15,000 a year until retirement at 60, can now expect £48,000 less to retire on.

Brown's quiet tax on fat cats

By Andrew Verity

THE Government has slapped an 11 per cent tax hike on more than 2,000 pensions of highly-paid senior executives - despite no explicit mention of the move in the Budget.

The Inland Revenue has confirmed that Budget changes to the taxation of trusts would boost capital gains tax on "top-up" pensions paid to senior employees from 23 to 34 per cent.

Accountants are sharply criticising the Government for failing to include explicit mention of the tax increase in any of the press releases put out when Gordon Brown made his Budget speech two weeks ago. Some

say the move was a surreptitious tax raid on the wealthy.

The top-up pensions, known as funded unapproved retirement benefit schemes (Furbs), are used by employees earning more than the Revenue's cap on earnings which qualify for tax relief, currently £87,600.

The schemes are increasingly used as a tax-efficient way to reward senior employees approaching retirement.

Companies pay tax at 40 per cent when they make contributions to these special pensions. But until now they have enjoyed a preferential rate of CGT of 23 per cent on the growth of the funds, rather than the higher rate of 34 per cent. Payouts from

the pensions are tax-free.

Information released on Budget Day made no mention of Furbs but did change the law to levy capital gains tax at 34 per cent on all trusts. Until now, Furbs, a particular type of trust, enjoyed exemptions from the higher rate of CGT.

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Telewest set for General Cable deal

By John Willcock

TELEWEST Communications is close to completing an agreed £666m acquisition of General Cable, in a further step towards the consolidation of the British cable industry.

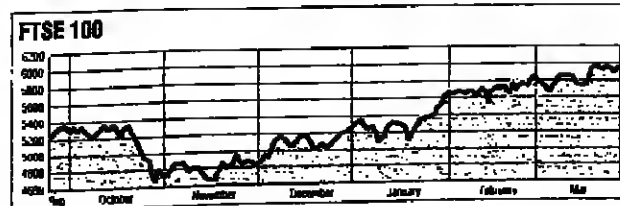
Telewest announced yesterday that "merger discussions between the two companies are at an advanced stage, which may result in a recommended offer being made." General Cable said it would "recommend the proposed offer if made."

The cash and shares offer ends months of speculation about General Cable's fate. UK rival Cable & Wireless Communications merged with a number of UK cable companies last year, leaving Telewest, General Cable and NTL as the remaining independent players.

Analysts said the Telewest deal would put it back in a market leading position, and leave NTL still needing a merger partner of its own.

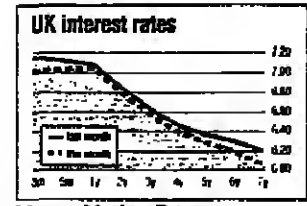
Stephen Davidson, chief executive of Telewest, said: "This is a crucial step in development of the industry and puts Telewest back in position. We are the natural partner for these businesses." Telewest said General Cable's 40 per cent shareholder General Utilities Holdings, a unit of French group Compagnie Generale des Eaux, had agreed to an offer pitched at 1,243 new Telewest shares and 65p in cash for every General Cable share.

STOCK MARKETS

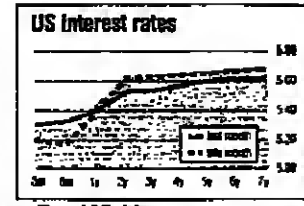


Indices	Close	Wk's chg	Wk's chg %	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield %
FTSE 100	5939.30	-17.00	-0.29	6105.5	4188.1	3.428
FTSE 250	5533.20	-17.20	-0.31	5644.0	4384.2	3.051
FTSE 350	2855.80	-5.00	-0.18	2917.7	2075.7	3.357
FTSE All Share	2759.44	-2.58	-0.09	2838.77	2056.07	3.331
FTSE SmallCap	2857.50	30.00	1.05	2831.4	2182.1	2.942
FTSE 1000	1415.30	10.20	0.73	1414.3	1225.2	3.213
FTSE 1000	1061.30	10.80	1.03	1109.3	965.9	1.055
FTSE 1000	8796.08	-110.35	-1.24	8959.24	6398.78	1.591
FTSE 1000	16739.26	-91.21	-0.54	20910.79	14408.21	0.901
FTSE 1000	11735.50	171.27	1.48	15820.31	7909.15	3.425
FTSE 1000	5083.16	81.61	1.63	5100.19	3182.38	1.582

INTEREST RATES

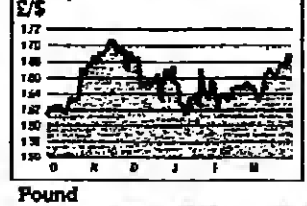


Money Market Rates	3 month	1 yr	1 yr chg	1 yr chg %
UK	7.59	1.18	7.59	0.59
US	5.69	0.08	5.68	-0.40
Japan	0.75	0.17	0.70	-0.01
Germany	3.55	0.30	3.81	0.39

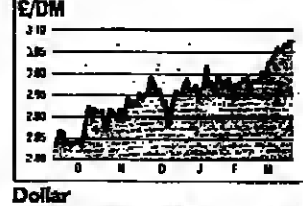


Bond Yields	10 year	1 yr chg	1 yr chg %	1 yr chg
UK	5.93	-1.70	5.85	-1.90
US	5.69	-1.22	5.96	-1.13
Japan	0.75	-0.85	2.48	-0.89
Germany	3.55	-1.04	5.47	-1.24

CURRENCIES



Found	Price	Wk's chg	Wk's chg %	1 yr chg
Dollar	1.6227	+1.726	1.0510	0.5943
£-Mark	3.0773	+2.216	2.7341	1.8280
Yen	219.28	+11.87	202.22	1.8280
£ Index	108.30	+0.90	98.00	108.30



Other Indicators	Close	Wk's chg	Wk's chg %	1 yr chg
Gold (\$)	322.85	11.10	3.48.15	180.30
Silver (\$)	6.38	0.44	6.13	180.30
Oil (\$)	14.51	2.26	18.58	114.10
Gas (\$)	1.10	0.04	3.63	1.10

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GAVYN DAVIES
ON TREASURY
HINTS IN FAVOUR
OF TIGHTENING
AND HOW
HIS REMARKS
TO THE SELECT
COMMITTEE
WERE
MISINTERPRETED

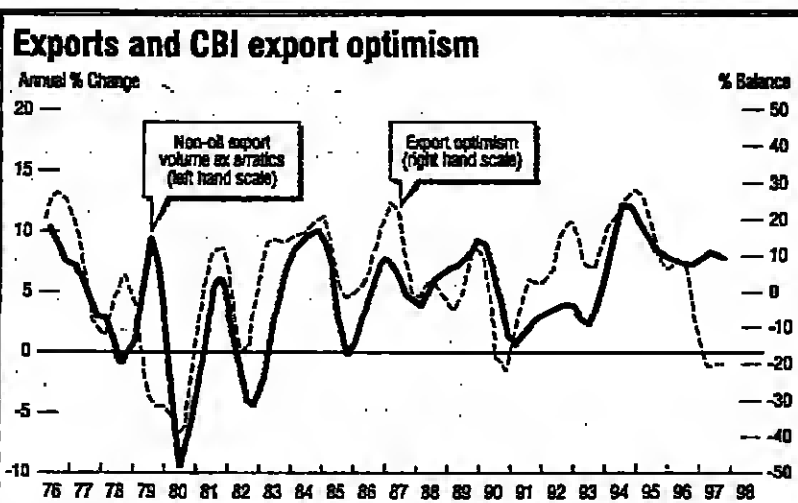
Teething troubles for the new money team

WHEN the Chancellor gave the Bank of England operational independence in the setting of interest rate policy on 6 May last year, one common criticism of the new regime was that it would make the co-ordination of fiscal and monetary policy more difficult.

Previously, all of the key decisions relating to economic management were in the hands of the Treasury, so there was simply no one else to blame when things went wrong. Now, even if there is no technical reason why co-ordination between the Bank and Treasury should prove problematic, it is only human nature that each of these institutions should seek to establish that it is the fault of the other if the economy is mismanaged.

In giving evidence to the Treasury Select Committee last week, Tim Congdon and I were faced with a series of questions which essentially amounted to an attempt to apportion blame between the Treasury and the Bank if the economic cycle should run off the rails in the next year or two. Since both of us happen to believe at the moment that domestic monetary policy should have been tightened more aggressively in the past two years – and especially from mid 1996 mid 1997 – this was interpreted in one of our more sensationalist national newspapers as a direct attack on the Governor. This is an absurdity, and I would now like to set the record straight.

Few people would contend today that policy has been optimal in the past two years, since at the very least the economy finds itself in a highly unbalanced state in the spring of 1998. But even with the considerable benefit of hindsight it is far from clear how matters could have been improved. Some observers (the City consensus) believe that fiscal policy



should have been tightened much more markedly in order to take the pressure off base rates and sterling. Others (like Congdon and myself) reckon that fiscal policy actually was tightened very substantially, and that an earlier and more decisive tightening in base rates would have killed the excess growth in domestic demand and thus dampened the rise in the exchange rate. A further group (centred around Ken Clarke) contends that no policy tightening was in fact necessary, since no inflation risk has become apparent, and that the problem with sterling has developed because base rates have risen too much, not too little.

The fact that this debate can still be raging about 18 months after many of the key decisions were actually taken graphically illustrates how difficult it is to set economic policy in the real world. As Eddie George says, the best economists are those who know how little they know, and this principle should be applied to

policy post-mortems as much as to anything else. Nevertheless, our new macro-framework in the UK is intended to increase openness and accountability, and we will never get anywhere unless we attempt to learn from past experience. So here goes.

Two years ago, there was an overwhelming consensus among British policy-makers that the one thing that must never be allowed to happen again was to allow domestic monetary policy to remain too loose as the spawning of an economic cycle gathered momentum. This was seen (rightly) as the cardinal sin of the late 1980s, and all of the officials who were even tangentially involved in this episode vowed that it could be repeated only over their dead bodies. The exemplary monetary tightening undertaken in late 1994 was implemented with exactly this in mind, and it was a remarkable success. Yet the puzzling aspect of the past two years has been how little

base rates have risen in the face of an intense and prolonged consumer boom.

Three entirely separate regimes have been in command of interest policy over this period. Firstly, when they have leaned to a dovish direction when they have actually been in control of the decision themselves, while at least two of them have been more hawkish for the remainder of the time.

In the run-up to the election, Ken Clarke rejected the repeated advice of the Governor to raise base rates faster than his electoral instincts allowed him to do. The Governor was clearly right about this, and many of our subsequent headaches stem from the fact that his advice was rejected. Then, when Gordon Brown was in control of base rates for a fleeting period, he opted to raise rates by only a quarter point on 6 May, when some were arguing the case for moving by at least a half point. Finally, the new Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank unanimously chose to raise rates very gradually last summer (and actually to announce a rate "freeze" last August) despite overwhelming evidence of a rampant consumer boom. In all of these episodes, the strength of sterling was given as the main reason for caution on base rates (and as the graph shows this is now seriously denting the export sector) but the upshot has been that the consumer sector has never really been stopped in its tracks, and this has left the economy in today's unbalanced condition.

The key question is how policy could have been adjusted last year to have brought sterling down more quickly. In order to answer this question, it would help to have a model which could explain the rise in sterling in the first place, but the Bank's best efforts in this direction have concluded that about seven-eighths

of the appreciation cannot be explained by monetary or other measurable factors. This means that we are inevitably in the realm of conjecture when we argue about whether a tighter fiscal stance, or a more decisive increase in base rates, would have led to an earlier peak in the exchange rate. My own conjecture is that the only thing that would have affected sterling would have been a slowdown in domestic demand – and that the only thing powerful enough to have quashed the growth in demand would have been considerably tighter domestic money. But the truth is that we shall never really know.

What we do know, however, is that the Treasury is giving some very aggressive hints to the Bank that monetary policy is still too loose. When Gordon Brown set the Bank free last year, he instructed them to achieve the Government's inflation objective and "without prejudice to this objective, to support the Government's economic policy, including its objectives for growth and employment". This perhaps allowed some wriggling room for the Bank in interpreting the precise meaning of the inflation objective, at least in terms of timing.

It now appears that the Treasury wants to tighten matters up. In the 1998 Budget, the Treasury simply says: "The inflation target is 2.5 per cent at all times: that is the rate which the MPC is required to achieve and for which it is accountable ... Inflation has so far been above the target rate most months. The effort and vigilance required to maintain low inflation should not be underestimated."

In other words: base rates need to go up; get on with it; and remember who said what to whom if inflation should rise in the years ahead.

Was Major's legacy greater equality?

By David Walker

THE TORY right wing now has a new charge to lay at John Major's door – the former Prime Minister is unmasked today as an egalitarian.

According to a new analysis of income distribution, the Major era from 1992-97 was marked by a dramatic shift in the tendency to growing inequality shown during the Thatcher years. Under him, Britain became more equal in terms of incomes. Updating previous work carried out for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation up to 1995, Professor John Hills of the London School of Economics suggests several reasons for Major era egalitarianism, most accidental.

People on the lowest incomes made up ground in the Nineties thanks to the end of the Poll Tax, which was remarkably regressive, and to falling unemployment. Relatively slow growth in incomes for higher earners had its effect, too, along with higher tax burdens for them.

Because real earnings grew little after 1992, the fact that benefits were linked to prices rather than earnings did not increase inequality as it had in the later 1980s, when earnings ballooned.

Paradoxically, the factors which seem to have done for the Tories – a sense of economic malaise despite growing employment – seem to have worked to make income distribution more equal.

Professor Hills even opens the possibility that the unwelcome success of Major in reducing inequality may turn out to be more dramatic than under Labour, which has – vaguely expressed – ambitions to cut inequality. "It is not clear whether these trends towards greater equality will be sustained for long enough – maybe, more than a decade – to reverse the previous, rapid growth in inequality," Professor Hills says.

But the halting of Thatcher-era trends towards greater inequality does show that the pressures for inequality "are not inexorable as does the difference in outcome of similar pressures in other countries". Between 1979 and 1995 average

incomes grew by about 40 per cent but for the richest 10th of the population they grew by over 60 per cent. For the poorest 10th, income growth was only about 10 per cent. The result of Thatcherism was that by the early Nineties, income inequality was greater than at any time since the 1940s. Thatcherism did not, however, have much impact on the distribution of wealth, whether or the "marketable" kind (saleable assets such as shares or housing) or wealth including non-tradeable pension rights. Britain was and remains highly unequal with the richest 1 per cent owning a fifth of all marketable wealth. Professor Hills wants the Government to publish an annual Poverty Report based on a basket of indicators allowing the Government to set targets, for example, for its policies on social exclusion. "Future numbers with relatively low incomes could reflect a race between the positive effects of measures to increase incomes from work at the bottom, and the negative effects of falling relative incomes for those remaining largely dependent on benefits."

Professor Hills's data confirm that the poor are not a constant group – the poor in any one year are not necessarily poor the next. But the number of permanent "escapes" from poverty are few.

* 'Income and wealth. The latest evidence', Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

The style slowcoaches will fall before mighty Marks

By Nigel Cope

City Correspondent

CLOTHING retailers are facing a shake-out as the most powerful names such as Marks & Spencer increase their grip on the high street. A survey published today by Verdict, the retail consultants, predicts the collapse of more high street retailers if they do not have a distinctive brand and a definite proposition, whether it is quality, design or price.

"We predict that M&S is going to increase its share of the UK clothing market by 4 per cent over the next five years and that share is going to have to come from somewhere," says Verdict's Clive Vaughan. Most

at risk are fashion stores that are "playing it safe" with undistinguished merchandise, the report says. Others who cut costs in customer service and supplying chain operations also risk alienating shoppers.

Verdict says the collapse of Foster's menswear into administration underlined the problems. Last week's profits warning from Next, for so long a star, showed how unforgiving shoppers are, it added. "With consumer spending growth going to be unexciting over the next couple of years, you are going to have to be distinctive to prosper," Mr Vaughan said.

The report identifies two ways to compete with M&S, which now accounts for 15 per

cent of the UK's £24.6bn clothing market. One is to be more fashionable but with distinctive styling as Monsoon, Next, Oasis and Kookai are. Another is to focus on "aspirational" brands which it says are becoming increasingly important. The report identifies small chains such as USC, Envy and Blakes as following that strategy.

Retailers that have been caught in the middle include Fosters, Littlewoods, Laura Ashley and Etam. Those that have continued to expand include Monsoon and New Look. However, the report cautions against the dangers of expanding too rapidly and placing too much pressure on systems and supply chains.

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Justice will be done

In just a year, the Criminal Cases Review Commission is beginning to convince defence solicitors that it means business. Grania Langdon-Down reports

"THEY ACTUALLY talk to us. They ring us up and discuss details of cases we have sent them. They even come to meet us." A year after the Criminal Cases Review Commission began work investigating potential miscarriages of justice, the note of disbelief in the voices of defence solicitors and other campaigners is still marked.

The commission got off to a flying start, referring the cases of Danny MacNamee, jailed in 1987 for conspiracy to cause the Hyde Park bombings, Mahmood Mattan, the Somali sailor hanged in 1952 for murdering a Cardiff shopkeeper, and Derek Bentley, hanged in 1953, back to the Court of Appeal within eight months of starting work. In February, the first of the commission's referrals to come before the Court of Appeal led to the quashing of Mr Mattan's conviction.

After years of struggling with the Home Office's C3 department, which was responsible for reviewing suspected miscarriages until March last year, it is the contrast in style between the two that prompts most comment from solicitors.

Jim Nichol, who represented the Bridgewater Three, is dealing with the commission over the M25 case, where three men were jailed for life in 1990 for murder and other crimes in and around Surrey. He says it is too early to judge whether the commission will produce the right results. However, he believes it is open to ideas and, on that level, is "incomparably better" than the Home Office.

Razia Karim, legal officer for campaign group Justice agrees. "In the past, you sent a case to the Home Office and it was like a black hole. You heard nothing for years and were then told yes or no. The commission will tell you the name of the person reviewing the case. They are very willing to discuss ideas and to come down to London to meet us."

One of Justice's cases dealt with by the Commission involved Mary Druhan, who was sentenced to life in 1989 for a double murder. Justice petitioned the Home Office for an appeal in 1993, which was considering rejecting the case when, last year, it was transferred to the commission. After a nine-month investigation, the commission decided to refer Ms Druhan's

case to the Court of Appeal. "I was pleased with their approach. It was very different to the Home Office, given that nothing substantially new had happened," says Ms Karim.

However, Justice was concerned about a backlog of cases building up - new cases are still waiting to be allocated a case-worker six months after being submitted. Apart from the 272 cases that were transferred from the Home Office - which arrived in the "most dreadful state", according to one of the commissioners - the commission took on 12 from the Northern Ireland Office. Of these 284 cases, 193 are still open.

New cases come in at the rate of four a day, with only one in 10 applicants legally represented. Of the 1,330 applications received by the end of March, 218 were being worked on, leaving 807 still open. The commission has completed 305 cases - referring 12 to the Court of Appeal, refusing 38 and rejecting 255 cases because they did not come within the commission's jurisdiction or were without merit.

The commission's brief, set out in the Criminal Appeal Act 1995, requires it to consider whether there is a "real possibility" that a conviction will be quashed if the case is given a further hearing in the Court of Appeal. For a case to be referred, there has to be an argument or evidence which has not been raised during the trial or at appeal, or exceptional circumstances.

The commission, based in Birmingham, is made up of 14 commissioners and 24 caseworkers. Its budget of nearly £6m has been increased to allow it to recruit another 16 caseworkers. The commissioners are keen to talk about their role within a criminal justice system that is still trying to rebuild public confidence after a series of devastating miscarriages of justice, including the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four.

Former crown prosecutor Fiona King, who also spent 10 years as a defence solicitor, is a part-time commissioner. She says the commission was the first organisation within the criminal justice system to bring European-style inquisitorial powers to bear on cases.

"A lot of miscarriages stem from our adversarial procedures, where it isn't so



Free at last: Gerry Conlon (above) of the Guildford Four celebrates his release, one of a series of devastating miscarriages of justice Peter Macdiarmid

much a search for the truth of who committed the crime but a search for the most likely candidate," she says. "The cases that have come to us fall into groups almost by age. In the 1970s, there were problems over identification. In the 1970s and early 1980s, it was false confessions. After the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, it was disclosure. However, we will need more cases under our belt before we can say this or that needs changing."

The question of what information discovered during its investigation the commission chooses to disclose to an applicant and when it discloses it is something that worries defence lawyers. Section 17 of the 1995 Act gives the commission wide powers to obtain material held by public bodies. It is considering asking the Government to extend that power to cover private organisations.

Commissioner Professor Leonard Leigh, a former law lecturer, is responsible for 11 of the more complicated cases and is overseeing another 15. He says the

commission tends to wait until it has completed its investigations before disclosing material to avoid a "running guerrilla war" with applicants' solicitors.

If the commission decides to refer a

representation will then be followed up.

But many solicitors worry that the Commission is setting too hard a test for cases to win referral to the Court of Appeal. Jane Winter, of campaign group

to the idea of undertaking more training in this field and intends visiting Northern Ireland to meet with people in the legal profession. It has also offered reassurance about the criteria for referrals. "They told us about a number of cases they are intending to refer, which nobody could say are dead certainties."

Another concern is the commission's use of police investigators. So far, it has instigated police inquiries into six cases. Professor Leigh says: "Realistically, there isn't anything else we can do. We have an investigations adviser and some of the caseworkers have police or legal experience. But in some of the major inquiries, you need a team of seven or eight officers. If we had our own investigators, we'd need about 70 people and no government is going to give you those sorts of resources."

Criminal Cases Review Commission, Alpha Tower, 21-22 Suffolk Street, Queensway, Birmingham B1 1TT (0121 633 1800).

After years of struggling with the Home Office's C3 department, it is the contrast in style between the two that prompts most comment from solicitors

case, it will disclose as much information as possible to the defence and the Crown Prosecution Service. If it decides not to, first it will send a letter to the applicant setting out the preliminary reasons for the decision and any documents, allowing 28 days for comments. Any reasonable rep-

resentation will then be followed up. But many solicitors worry that the Commission is setting too hard a test for cases to win referral to the Court of Appeal. Jane Winter, of campaign group

to the idea of undertaking more training in this field and intends visiting Northern Ireland to meet with people in the legal profession. It has also offered reassurance about the criteria for referrals. "They told us about a number of cases they are intending to refer, which nobody could say are dead certainties."

Muscling in on your move

Ignore conveyancing call-centres at your peril, Nick Hilborne warns solicitors

CONVEYANCING was once the bread and butter of many small, high-street solicitors. The income from it was even used to subsidise the work of other departments. Not any longer. A threat to has emerged in the past year which is potentially more dangerous than furious price-cutting: the arrival of licensed conveyancers or the prospect of rocketing professional indemnity premiums.

In April 1997, Britain's biggest estate agents, Hamro Countrywide, opened its first seven-day conveyancing call-centre in Woking, Surrey. Two national solicitors' firms have followed suit and are experiencing phenomenal rates of growth. Conveyancers know these call-centres will attract a big chunk of the market - but how big?

Shoosmiths & Harrison, a solicitors' firm with offices across the Midlands and South, developed its Property Direct conveyancing operation to work alongside Hamro Countrywide's second call-centre, which opened in Northampton in June 1997. Shoosmiths has been able to offer its services to other clients, most recently Barclays Mortgages.

Graham New, managing partner at Shoosmiths, is anxious to play down the impact of conveyancing call-centres on smaller firms, saying only that the telephone-based approach will gain a "substantial" rather than dominant market share.



House calls: do the conveyancing over the phone

"The philosophy Hamro and the lenders have is not so much to make loads of money as to gain control of the house-buying process," he says. "Direct lenders are becoming more sophisticated in the way they deal with mortgages. Sending out instructions into the traditional fragmented market, they have no control over how quickly and effectively the job is done."

Property Direct is divided into teams of six to eight paralegals, each supervised by a solicitor and working on a shift basis. Mr New claims that it has cut the average time of a

conveyancing operation by up to 50 per cent, to around six to eight weeks. Fees start from £295 for sales or purchases.

Property Direct currently employs 60 to 70 staff, a figure which Mr New aims to double by the end of the year. "Our view is that this is the future of conveyancing," he says. "Not everyone will instruct a direct conveyancing operation, but people are becoming much more used to buying services directly from home using the phone. They don't want to take half a day off to see a solicitor."

Kevin Doolan, banking and

finance partner at Eversheds, Britain's biggest national law firm, Eversheds has co-operated with Hamro Countrywide in its Cardiff call-centre, opened last month, and a Manchester centre is due to open in April. Other national firms, Hammonds Suddards, Dibb Lupton Alsop and Addleshaw Booth & Co are said to be keen to move into domestic conveyancing.

Mr Doolan also anticipates a future of exponential growth, with the 100 or so staff currently employed in Cardiff and Manchester doubling in numbers every nine months. "It's an incredible rate of growth, but the demand is definitely out there," he says. "All we are doing is mimicking things our lender clients have already done."

Doolan estimates that the conveyancing call-centres probably control around 5 per cent of a market worth anything up to £500m. In two years' time, he predicts this figure will reach 25 per cent, and as much as 40 per cent in five years.

"Before Direct Line there were insurance brokers on every High Street. Where are they now? The only way small solicitors' firms are going to be able to compete is by getting together and forming groups. There is no reason why a group of small firms could not do exactly what we're doing," he says.

Nick Hilborne is news editor of 'Solicitors Journal'.

APPOINTMENTS: LEGAL

EASTER OPENINGS

MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE

To £35,000
The well-known medium-sized City firm has a thriving medical negligence practice that will give a 2-year qualified specialist every opportunity to build a reputation for working on some of the highest profile and most challenging cases in the field. A good opening for the right person. Ref: D47885

PROPERTY

To £70,000
Enjoy the frontline at one of London's most high-profile law firms as a senior property assistant with 2-5 years' experience. With a strong media clientele, there will be some interesting and varied work, and as you will be working in the firm's most profitable department, the prospects for partnership are excellent. Ref: D29225

TAX

To £38,000
If, as a 0-2 years' qualified corporate tax lawyer, you want to develop both your practical experience of major City deals and your academic study of the subject, look no further. This highly profitable medium-sized practice will encourage you to do both. The work will be a mix of transactional and advisory. Ref: D48118

PENSIONS/BENEFITS

To £40,000
This reason the leading City firm has a workload and reputation that many larger practices envy is because of the way it treats its lawyers, giving them all they need to become top-notch advisers. If you have 1-3 years' experience in pension/employee benefits work, this move will set you up for the rest of your career. Ref: D22226

INSOLVENCY

To £50,000
You might as well start at the top, and the London office of this major national firm is just that for non-contentious insolvency work. The clients, the experience and the salaries are unbeatable in the field, whether you have 0-1 or 2-3 years' experience. You could be a company/commercial lawyer looking to switch. Ref: D29089

CAPITAL MARKETS

To £70,000
Promotion that will soon see you appointed a vice-president, as well as a salary that is great even without the huge bonus - it's a good life in-house at one of the world's leading finance houses. It needs corporate or banking lawyers at all levels for a broad capital markets role that also takes in corporate finance. Ref: D36019

LITIGATION

To £40,000
If you can handle a big and varied caseload, and work closely with clients, then you will have a very bright future at this expanding City firm, which has just completed a very good merger. A litigator with 3-7 years' experience will have a 50/50 legal expenses insurers/general commercial split in their work. Ref: D47801

IT/ITP

To £75,000
This top 10 City firm offers an exciting cocktail of high quality work and prospects to ambitious IT/ITP lawyers with 2-5 years' experience. If that was not enough, you will have a name on your CV that will look good whatever you do, and a training and development programme that will help you become a real expert. Ref: D16886

CORPORATE/COMMERCIAL

To £58,000
A US firm without the usual billing pressures - that's the offer from the London office of this US firm, which needs a corporate/commercial lawyer with 1-4 years' experience and marketing skills to advise on a broad spread of work, much of it in media, such as film contracts. Ref: D17332

SHIPPING LITIGATION

To £50,000
You could be a stellar career in shipping litigation after a tour of duty at this leading niche firm in the City, but do not worry - there are no icebergs to fear. It will be full steam ahead for a shipping litigator with 2-3 years' experience who can show clients both enthusiasm and a common-sense approach. Ref: D5556

LITIGATION

To £40,000
What makes this West End firm especially attractive is its market-leading media practice and a training programme that will ensure you are ready to handle a challenging and varied commercial litigation caseload. As well as 1-2 years' experience, you need the personality to stand on your own two feet with clients. Ref: D41348

PROJECT FINANCE

To £50,000
After an initial spell in this top City firm's London office, you will relocate to Hong Kong to play a key role in a project finance practice which is the envy of many larger firms. An extremely lucrative equity partnership is the reward for a senior lawyer who can show excellent practice development and language skills. Ref: D27180

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Molluscs, mud and a face to die for



Nicholas Schoon is beguiled by a bog that has a hold on its admirers, and their boots

THE little-known mud springs of Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire are a weird, heguling natural phenomenon. They are not much to look at and *The Independent* found them rather dangerous. But they do steadily disgorge the most exquisite fossils along with vicious grey ooze and they seem to be unique, not just in Britain but in the world.

A visit was called for after we heard that Wootton Bassett's town council's finance and general purpose committee had put forward the springs for World Heritage status. The council hopes to persuade Cabinet culture supremo Chris Smith to seek Unesco's highest accolade for them, putting this little bog alongside Britain's 17 existing World Heritage Sites which include Canterbury Cathedral, Stonehenge and the Georgian glory of Bath.

We were shown round by councillor Eric Hodges, a 68-year-old retired biology teacher who is the spring's greatest enthusiast. A short tramp along a canal tow-path, a sharp right-hand turn towards the copse and there before our eyes was the largest of the springs – a big

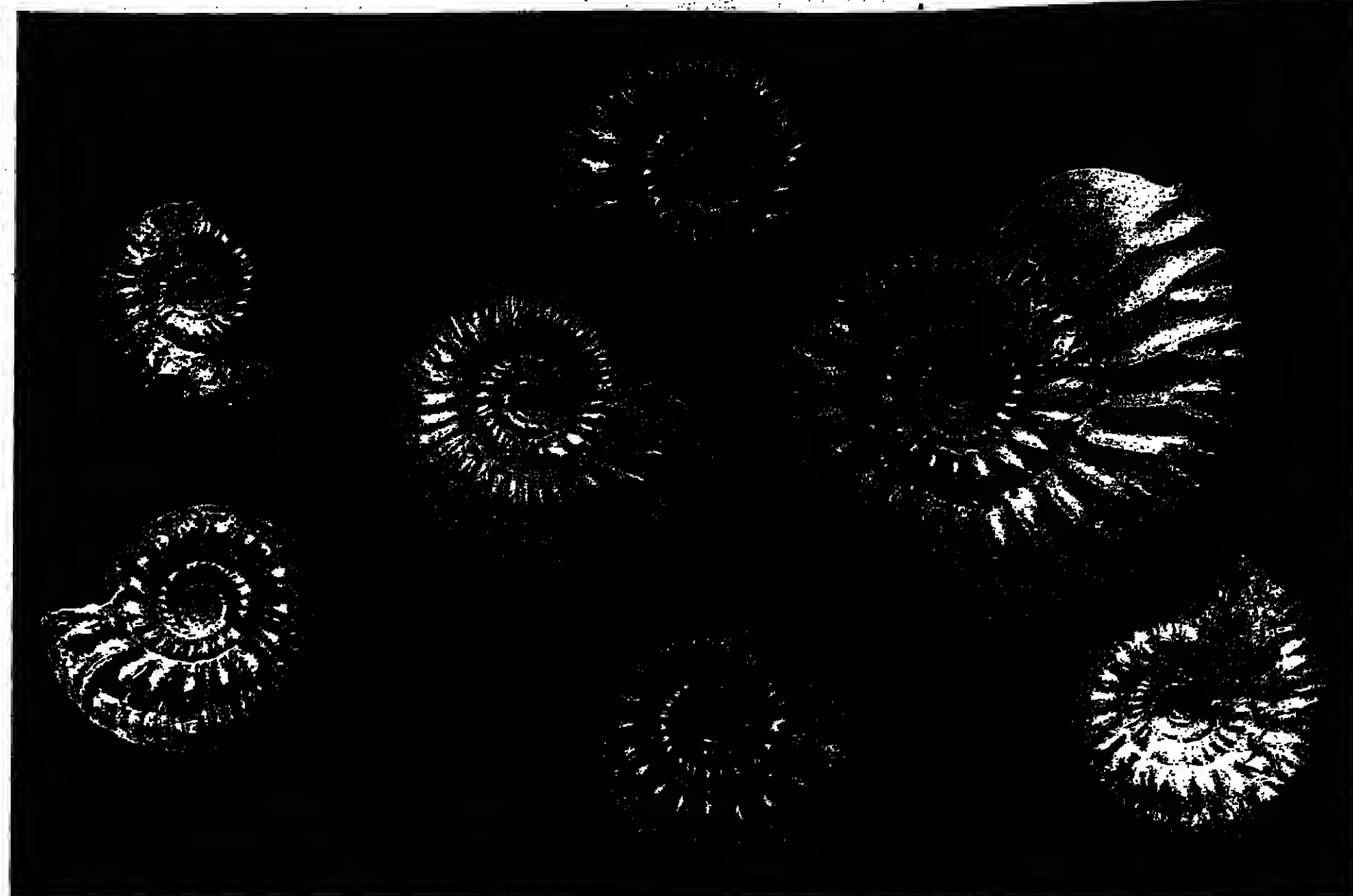
pond full of nothing but grey mud, surrounded by barbed wire fencing with a danger sign.

The councillor nimble crossed the wire and guided us around, showing off several of the vegetation-surrounded vents from which Jurassic slime wells ceaselessly from below. He took me to Hancock's Water, a neighbouring stream into which the mud pours and where fossils can be found.

Back in 1974 workers from a sewage works a few hundred metres down stream noticed the flow of mud down the water course and went to investigate the source. They decided to dig down into one of the vents, but that caused a terrifying blow out. The earth shook and slime jetted high in the air plastering the surrounding trees.

Clearly, what had been thought of as merely a local bog was altogether more potent. Wiltshire County Council tried to plug one of the vents by dropping 100 tons of rubble down it. That disappeared without trace and the area of mud expanded, turning it into the slime pond you can see today.

Investigations by scientists from the British Geological



Perfectly preserved: Some of the fossilised ammonites (above) still with their mother-of-pearl lustre, which rise out of Wootton Bassett springs with a thick grey ooze that, according to Helen's Unisex Hair Salon in the Wiltshire town, makes an excellent rejuvenating face mask, seen (left) being applied to salon chair jule. Each Photograph: John Lawrence

Survey and elsewhere have begun to unravel how the springs work. Their starting point is the ground-water which, under pressure, moves upwards out of a layer of porous limestone, the Coral Rag, lying 70ft deep.

This rising water moves into a layer of clay deposited in a shallow sea about 150 million years ago. It appears that the water has opened large caverns in the solid clay, full of mud. This breaks out at the surface vents forming large blisters.

where some of the mud congeals and some oozes into the stream. All this and more Mr Hodges explained as we explored the springs - and then disaster struck. He misjudged a step and plunged deep into mud which nearly covered the top of both Wellington boots. We managed to free first him then one of the boots, but the other proved quite impossible to wrestle out and lies there still. As he hobbled away unbooted, he explained his vision

for the prospective World Heritage site. There would be secure viewing platforms from which visitors could gaze at the mud, while large interpretation boards would explain the working and history of the springs.

The ooze is popular at Helen's Unisex Hair Salon in Wootton Bassett, where manageress Amanda Hamilton offers it free as a rejuvenating face mask. "After 15 minutes it dries and shrinks to form a really tight mask," she said. "It exfol-

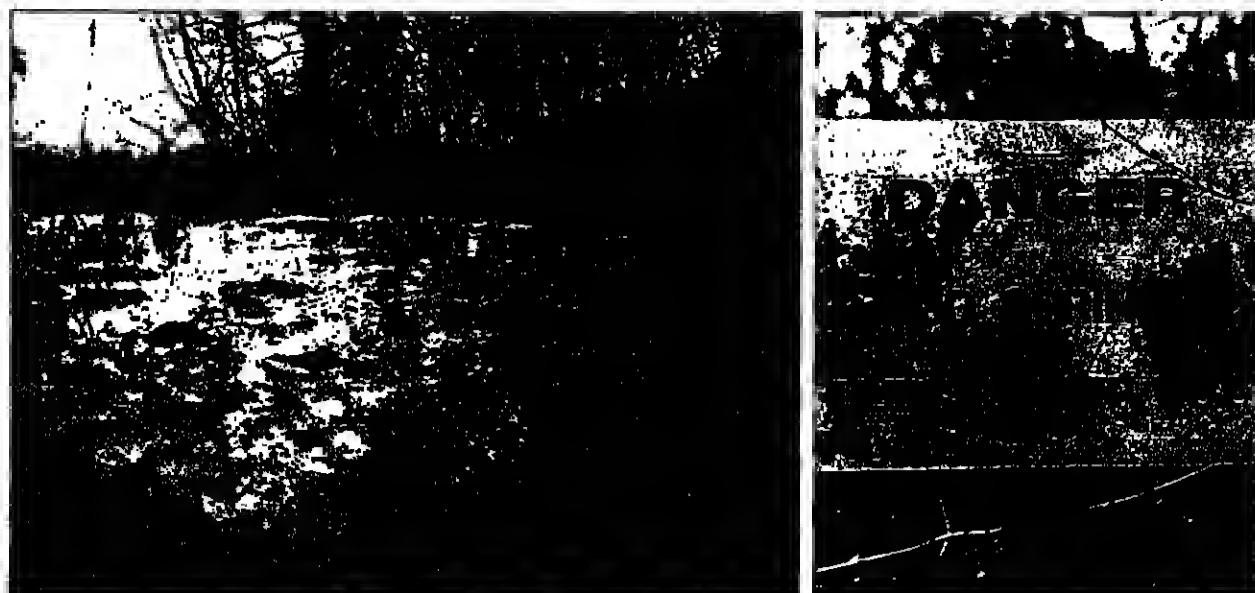
At the Natural Environment Research Council's headquarters in nearby Swindon, Neville Hollingsworth, a senior geologist, showed me fossils he had found at the springs. The ammonites, little molluscs, still had their original mother of pearl shells with a lustre and hue which made them look like strange jewellery.

of an "El Niño" year, a gigantic sea reptile. One day, of his early fossil-hunting trips there, Mr. Hollingworth fell into a vent up to his chest. "I was absolutely terrified," he said.

The Government designated the mud springs an Official Site of Special Scientific Interest earlier this year. But even though Chris Smith has said he wants to see a few more British World Heritage sites which are natural rather than man-made, it is hard to see Wootton Bassett

sett's mud springs mounting a serious challenge to places such as Oxford, which are also trying to get on this most select of lists. World Heritage sites have to be of outstanding value significant to all mankind. "We'll consider any site ... but we have been stressing that the criteria are extremely strict," said a spokeswoman for the Department of Culture.

Undaunted, Mr Hodges insists: "Our mud springs are absolutely unusual and unique."

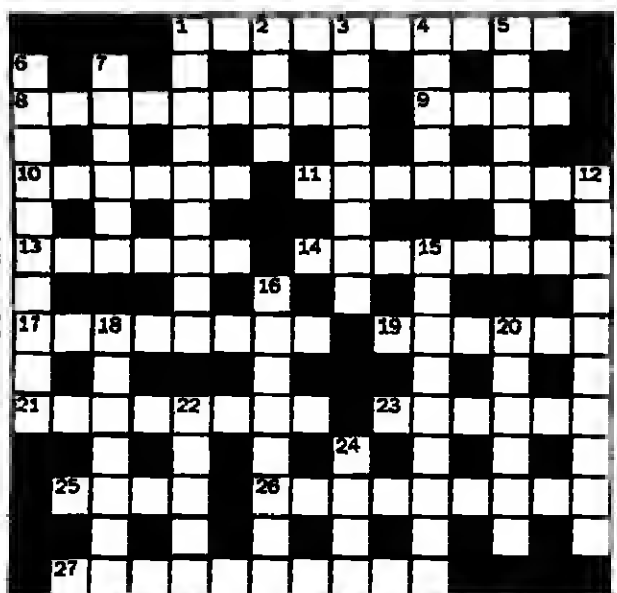


Glorious: The mud pond (left) created after sewage workers dug into a natural vent at the springs in 1974 – the result was a blow-out which coated nearby trees in slime. A hazard sign deters unwary walkers. Photographs: Austin Harrave/NS

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3571. Monday 30 March

By Patricia



26 English architect's mean about Latin American city (9)
27 If Ann's sure, it could result in inequality (10)

DOWN

- 1 Fellow's proper shocking (9)
- 2 Case for getting fit (4)
- 3 Settles for taking in fifty quails (8)
- 4 Told of opening total (5)
- 5 Important directions given ahead of chase (7)
- 6 Liberal tendency of an independent person (4,6)
- 7 Pointed spine attached to flowering plant (6)
- 12 American gambler's back with more hopeful proposition (1,6,5)
- 15 Family details one's against filling a joke (9)
- 16 Sentence that's a joke ? (3,5)
- 18 Prison press for payment information around mid-October (7)
- 20 Yielding money held by opera company (6)
- 22 Head off to discover one area of the country (5)
- 24 Land in Lewis left to her (4)

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1	Delivery man who doesn't hang about? (4,6)
8	Essential that army unit is completely encircled (9)
9	Number stolen from Russian flower girl (4)
10	Priest has misrepresented Hebrew prophet (6)
11	Outlines East Ham club's plan (8)
13	Go mad over a female splitting rice dish (6)
14	Traveller has break and goes out East to stay (8)
17	Give way about party, making one think (8)
19	Fail to get into court room (6)
21	Definite mix-up about one's second class (8)
23	Dared state Proust's written about (6)
25	Frost made of metal (4)

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